Alabama, New Jersey, & the Agrigento Network

Examining the short-lived Birmingham Family and the Sicilian networks that connected it to the DeCavalcante and Gambino Families, among others.

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Surprises still lurk in the history of the US mafia after decades of publicity and law enforcement scrutiny. The historic Cosa Nostra activity we're most familiar with often corresponds to organizations whose branches are the most exposed. New York City for example has given us extensive knowledge of its Cosa Nostra membership and activities, allowing us to work backward from later outgrowth to discover its roots.

Some of the smaller American Families remain mysterious, with researchers relying on fleeting anecdotes and superficial coverage via newspapers and occasional crime-specific prosecution that overlooks organizational details and internal politics. These sources are helpful but inherently limited, though we still have the essential research ingredient: we know these Families existed. If there is no evidence of an organization in a certain location it is near-impossible to identify its relevance to mafia history, though occasionally we receive confirmation of a Cosa Nostra presence in a previously unknown location.

There is little reason to believe any unknown Families came into existence after the 1930s and we can speak with a degree of confidence about which groups still existed after this period. The same is not necessarily true for Cosa Nostra's history prior to the formation of the Commission in 1931. FBI informants, government witnesses, and memoirs have given us the early American mafia's basic framework, though these accounts are generally the product of a later era and even sources who were around at the time are recalling old memories without the fresh details recent experience can provide. Still, surprising information can surface that changes our understanding of who and what existed where. One small footnote can shift our knowledge of Cosa Nostra's history and extend its network to locations we were previously unaware of.

This is true for Alabama, where a formal Cosa Nostra Family existed but faded from view before the public became fully aware of America's mafia landscape. Definitive information on Alabama’s exact hierarchy, membership, and range

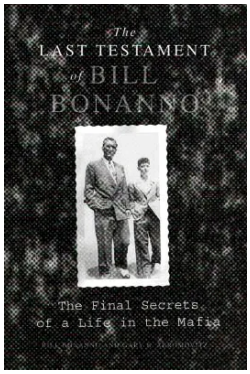
of operations is lost to time, but Alabama's presence in early mafia history is confirmed and we know the names of some individuals connected to the networks that fueled it. This article explores some of these disparate dots and attempts to connect them through our understanding of Cosa Nostra's larger patterns. The dots, though few, are not as distant as they might seem.

The article also veers into tangential information not directly related to the Birmingham area using what we know about the Sicilian *compaesani* (townsmen) groups that show up in Alabama in order to better contextualize the mafia environment that formed this organization. In addition to Alabama, individuals and Families discussed here will include the DeCavalcante, Gambino, Tampa, Chicago, and Kansas City Families, all of which were “in network” with Alabama to varying degrees especially as it relates to the mafia stronghold of Agrigento province. This article examines other mafiosi from the same Sicilian villages that surface in Alabama and the organizations they belonged to as well as the different geographic locations they ended up in. It’s all connected — most of it at least.

A Southern Revelation

The son of tenured New York boss and Commission member Joe Bonanno, Bill Bonanno was a leading Cosa Nostra member himself who fell from grace alongside his father in the mid-1960s. Bill became a secret FBI informant and later authored multiple books about his life in the mafia. His final memoir, *The Last Testament of Bill Bonanno*, was published in 2011 shortly after Bill passed away of natural causes. His co-author and confidant, lawyer Gary Abromovitz, assisted with the book's completion and naturally researchers have scoured each page for previously unpublished details from this unique Cosa Nostra scion.

While mainstream audiences may be attracted to Bill's tall tales about JFK and platitudes about Sicilian-American honor, hardcore followers of the subject are drawn to the names of previously unidentified members, insider explanations of mafia politics, and organizational data that keep the flames of mafia history alive and inform further research. Bill Bonanno's parting work was not without flaws or further questions, but it did generously deliver new leads to pursue.



The Last Testament of Bill Bonanno

Elaborating on Cosa Nostra's evolution from a purely Sicilian phenomenon to an Italian-American “syndicate”, Bill recounted how the mafia crawled its way through the Southern United States first through New Orleans, soon establishing Families in other known outposts using networks established in Sicily. It’s known from other sources that the formation and maintenance of a Family is and was a highly formal process requiring that existing mafiosi receive official recognition from Cosa Nostra's national governing bodies, first under the *capo dei capi* and *Gran Consiglio* system, then later under its replacement the Commission. These mafia organizations were not arbitrary clusters of Italian criminals operating under a de facto hierarchy, but interlocking pieces of a time-honored system in which well-connected inviduals with membership in the same parent organization headed local branches using the same rules, protocol, and structure found in Sicily. Sicilian immigrants were drawn to certain regions of their new country through economic opportunity, kinship-informed chain migration, and in some cases affiliation with Cosa Nostra. The locations where Cosa Nostra ended up were not pre-planned but the formation of a new group was anything but arbitrary.

Bill Bonanno surprised readers in his *Last Testament* by identifying a previously unknown Family in an unlikely location: Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham was the only organization mentioned by Bill that was as-of-yet unheard of. In his discussion of how Cosa Nostra wound its way through the United States from the South upward, Bill first refers to New Orleans, St. Louis, and Kansas City as America's initial mafia organizations, followed by a number of other groups around the United States before he eventually cites a Birmingham-based Family that he asserts came into being around the middle of this dissemination process, with still other Families forming even later. Available evidence supports his statements about New Orleans and the Missouri Families, though the rest of the list appears random and some Families that are believed to have existed earlier are placed relatively late in his account.

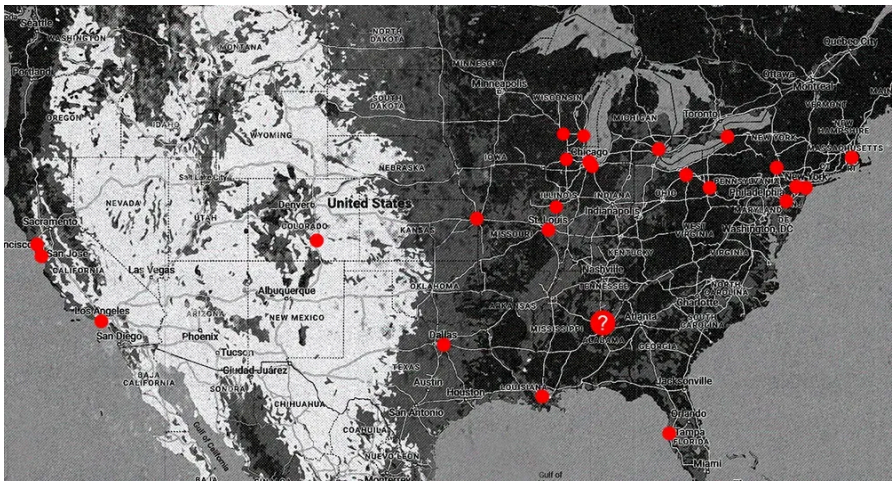
What's important is not Bill Bonanno's understanding of which Family formed when, but that he includes Birmingham on a list otherwise populated by well-known organizations. Bill states too that many immigrants from Palermo settled in Alabama. This is not said in context with the mafia but in a segment about general Sicilian immigration patterns. He does elaborate more on this Birmingham Family a short time later, discussing the group only in its final hour.

Bill Bonanno identified a Cosa Nostra presence in Birmingham.

According to Bill, the Birmingham Family was a withered and decrepit organization by the 1930s. The Family requested permission from the Commission to disband in the mid-1930s when the youngest member turned 80-years-old and the only recruitment prospect was 74, the Commission granting their request. Bill says the Commission assigned Lucchese boss Tom Gagliano to represent Birmingham's interests and by 1938 the last living member was deceased. This is the totality of his information on the Alabama mafia group.

Born in 1932 and inducted into his father's New York City organization in 1954 as a member and then *capodecina* of the Family's Arizona outpost, Bill Bonanno no doubt pulled his knowledge of this obscure group from older members. Though he does not cite a specific source, his father Joe Bonanno represented a Brooklyn-based Family from 1931 to 1964 and sat on the Commission for the first 33 years of its existence. Bill was a confidant of his father Joe and interviewed him extensively prior to the elder Bonanno's passing in 2002 at the age of 97.

Bill was also related through marriage to the Profaci clan, leaders of another Brooklyn Family whose elder members may have shared historical anecdotes with their younger in-law. Regardless of the details he shared or who provided him with this information, there is no reason to doubt Bill Bonanno's basic claim that a Family existed in Alabama. In fact, his revelation prompted further research that supports his general statement.



Alabama had a Family, but who and what was it?

The Cosa Nostra network did extend to Birmingham and other areas of Alabama. Men from established Sicilian mafia strongholds settled in the area and others passed through during the unsettled early years of American mafia activity. Larger social, economic, and cultural factors that informed Cosa Nostra's development rested on shifting sand in the decades prior to the 1930s and our current notion of what a "mafia city" consisted of was still in its formative stages. Birmingham quietly came and went during this transition process and opens speculation as to whether similar examples in other US regions are quietly hiding somewhere in history. Barring revelations from men like Bill Bonanno, few of whom remain living, we are unlikely to confirm the existence of other formal groups but for now we can at least explore what's currently known about Alabama.

The Bigger Picture

Mafia history shows certain developmental trends that reinforce a general rule: Cosa Nostra was formed in Western Sicily, being comprised largely of kinship-based clans in specific villages, regions, and districts. The Sicilian mafia today is not identical to its ancestors in every way, though it still mirrors the basic politics, structure, and recruitment methods found among its ancestors and direct lineage to these early members and groups still exists in most if not all of the same locations on the island. As far back as the 1870s in Palermo and the 1880s in Favara, Agrigento, Italian investigations collected information that reveals similar structure, ranks, rituals, and many of the same rules applied in Sicily that we see today in America. The mentality found in the 19th century mafia is in many ways virtually identical to what exists today in this fundamentally conservative organization that manages to expand internationally with shocking flexibility without changing what it is.

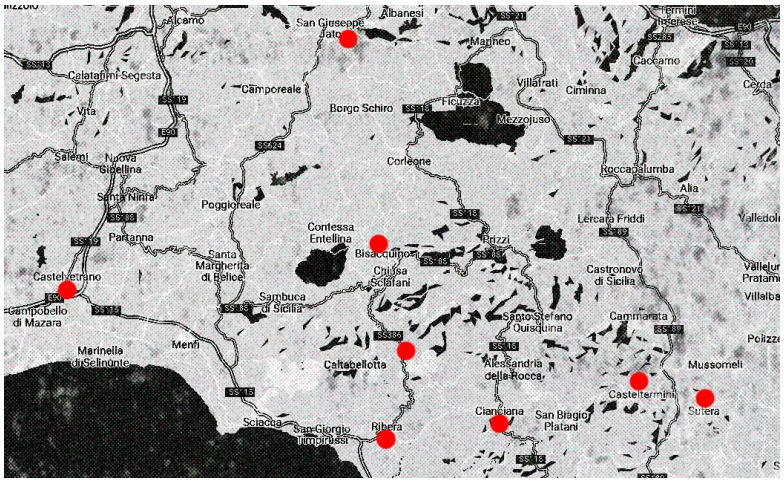
Cosa Nostra existed in Favara long before the 20th century.

When the organization transplanted itself to the United States it replicated itself accordingly, with colonies of interconnected *compaesani* interfacing with men from other nearby villages to form distinct groups that strengthened in number and gained influence via shared affiliation rather than division, with collaboration being a far more common theme than overt competition despite occasional warfare and violent enforcement practices. Some US cities and regions appear to have had multiple Families earlier in their existence, not unlike New York albeit smaller, with initial steps toward Americanization likely involving multiple *compaesani*-based Families joining together to form a single organization in a given US city or region. Evidence of this process exists in Philadelphia thanks to information from longtime member and FBI informant Harry Riccobene in addition to circumstantial evidence elsewhere.

Birmingham had Sicilian immigrants from multiple Western Sicilian provinces, though the specific villages in question tended to border one another geographically across provincial lines, bringing men together from a similar regional background with experience in the mining trade and agricultural labor. Though this process was not exclusive to the mafia, many early American mafia Families followed this pattern throughout the country, with the intersection of immigrants from nearby villages creating commonality that was no doubt enhanced by their shared status as Sicilian foreigners in a new land. There was incentive to band together as part of the *Societa Onorata* or *Fratellanza*, Sicilian mafia synonyms for what both America and Sicily now call Cosa Nostra, an essentially nameless organization that was universally understood by its members and affiliates regardless of the phrase used to invoke it.

Villages that funneled likely mafiosi and their relatives into Alabama included Bisacquino, San Giuseppe Jato, Sutera, Campofranco, Casteltermini, Cianciana, Burgio, Ribera, Castelvetrano and others from the provincial borders connecting rural Palermo, Trapani, Agrigento, and Caltanissetta on

the lower part of the island. Most of these towns are familiar to both Sicilian and American mafia researchers, being that they have a long history as mafia strongholds and produced well-known transatlantic names. It was perhaps inevitable that an undetermined number of Cosa Nostra figures would follow their *compaesani* to Alabama given the prevalence of mafia traditions in this network of villages.



A regional mafia network can be connected to Alabama.

Stepping away from the mafia, rural Sicilians in general were fundamental to the minority Italian population in Birmingham. Inland Sicily near the southern coast relied on mining and agricultural activity that provided locals with experience as farmers, laborers, and managers of sulfur and iron extraction, with Alabama's mining opportunities offering a natural fit for many of these Sicilian workers. As evidenced by the 1883 Sicilian *Fratellanza* investigation into a warring mafia Family in the Agrigento town of Favara, mining fell under the influence and even domination of local mafiosi, though generalizations should not be made: many Sicilian immigrants were simply looking for work and experience in the mining industry informed their overseas destinations with no evidence of criminal intent or corruption.

The extent to which the local Cosa Nostra organization infiltrated the mining trade in Sicilian-born Alabama residents' native villages is unknown, as is the level of influence the local Birmingham Family had over this industry in the United States, though cities like Pittston show the local mafia was capable of seizing a tight grip on mining given the right opportunity and circumstance. Farming also attracted rural Sicilians to Alabama and a clan of mafiosi existed in remote Russellville near the Mississippi border, including at least one man suspected of leadership over the Birmingham group despite living and working a significant distance from Birmingham during the period this Family is believed to have been most active.

Our general ignorance of the Birmingham mafia makes it impossible to theorize about their level of control, if any, over local trades and industries, as well as the sophistication of their organized crime activities. The local iron trade however was noted for having groups of Italian laborers referred to as "floating gangs" comprised of men who worked in the iron industry but had no specific duties and simply did whatever task was needed. One can imagine how the mafia might be able to manipulate these arrangements but for Cosa Nostra to take full advantage of the industry it would have required a degree of proprietorship like we see in the early Pittston Family, where mafia leaders owned mining companies and manipulated labor activism. Still, these industries were familiar to Sicilian mafiosi in their homeland and we often see American Cosa Nostra groups develop around these activities.

“Floating gangs” of Italians were utilized in the Birmingham iron industry.

Despite the public's conception of a highly-concentrated urban mafia presiding over underworld activity on the gritty streets of New York and Chicago, the Sicilian mafia was and is largely a rural phenomenon. Sicily's economy is heavily agricultural, sustaining the bulk of its villages through the local land, with mafia membership shaped by this influence and in turn influencing it themselves. Along with organized cattle rustling, one of the earliest known rackets in Sicily involved the mafia's control over irrigation pipelines, with local mafiosi taxing farmers seeking to keep their crops watered.

Throughout its documented history the Sicilian mafia also inducted and promoted men with acceptable and even respectable positions in broader society, including doctors, businessmen, and politicians, though it balanced this upper class demographic with rugged farmers, bandits, thieves, and laborers who helped form a membership core that couldn't be typecast as it is today in America. These men were typically interrelated and all belonged to the same organization despite their differences. Through this diversity the mafia exerted its wide range of influence and capitalized on resources. Its

members were united in secrecy, casting a malevolent silence designed to repel outsiders and maintain discipline among insiders.

Available evidence suggests the Sicilian mafia's diverse identity was carried to the early United States as well, with sources like Nicola Gentile describing doctors who worked alongside "gangsters" as formal members and even bosses of Cosa Nostra. Alabama was in certain ways an easy fit for highly-adaptable Sicilian mafiosi, especially members who descended from inland areas outside of Sicily's "aristocratic" coastal access points. Birmingham was not, however, as hospitable to Sicilian immigrants as other cities, where significant Little Italy colonies and everflowing immigrant clusters helped Italians retain their identity, which in some neighborhoods was inseparable from Cosa Nostra. Understanding how a Birmingham Family came to exist also requires an examination as to why it was not able to sustain itself as other Families did around the country. The reasons may not have been economic or criminal, but rather cultural.

Minority Report

A report on the Italian history of Birmingham notes that 90% of the Italian immigrants in Birmingham were Sicilian and 30% of this number were from Bisacquino in southern Palermo province, a small village near Corleone and the provincial border with Agrigento that most notably produced the infamous transatlantic mafioso Vito Cascio Ferro as well as the multi-generation DiLeonardo clan of the Gambino Family, who were close friends of Cascio Ferro. This high percentage of Sicilians and specifically Bisacquinesi within an otherwise small Italian community is comparable to Tampa, Florida, where a similar majority of its Italian colony descended from Western Sicily, specifically a set of mafia-dominated villages neighboring one another in Agrigento.

An article on the history of Tampa's Sicilian community states that the village of Santo Stefano Quisquina, which also surfaces in Birmingham, formed 60% of the Italian community, not even counting neighboring villages that also provided Tampa residents. These closely-connected Agrigento villages in Tampa reveal statistics comparable to Birmingham's 90% Sicilian population within its own Italian community. The Tampa colony produced what is today known as the Trafficante Family and we can use this data to understand how Birmingham developed its own Family. The largest contributing factor behind the creation of a recognized Cosa Nostra Family was not a large pan-Italian community but a highly-concentrated Western Sicilian population where the mafia subculture was known and its "laws" were practiced.

In addition to Bisacquino, other villages noted in the report as producing significant numbers of Birmingham Sicilians were Campofranco, Cefalu, and Sutera. Immigrants from Grotte, Agrigento, were specifically named in the report as arriving to Birmingham to work in the sulfur mines, a trade many of the area's labor-ready Sicilians had experience in. Grotte is just over 8.5 miles from Favara, where the *Fratellanza* investigation identified absolute mafia dominance over the mining industry in the early 1880s. Immigrants from Bisacquino had history as miners as well but the village's name ominously means "Father of the Knife," derived from the Arabic *Abu-seckin*, *a* reference to the town's history of commercially producing knives using goat horns as handles.

Knives made with goat horns gave Bisacquino its ominous name.

Before 1898, most Sicilians came to Birmingham from New Orleans while after 1898 they came via New York, with Ellis Island becoming the primary port of entry for immigrants, Italians being no exception. Some of the known mafiosi in Alabama arrived in New York following this shift, though the report on Birmingham Italians states this change in entry point had no immediate impact on chain migration, which continued through New York as it had in New Orleans, the presence of *compaesani* and relatives in Alabama being a bigger attracting force than port of entry. Supporting this is that some mafia-connected figures who surface in Alabama came to the area through both New Orleans and New York, though the pre-1898 arrangement in Louisiana made immigration to Alabama easier and over time these changes did greatly limit Alabama's Sicilian and Italian growth along with restrictive changes in immigration policy.

The Italian identity and its core traditions were said to be difficult to maintain in Birmingham because the Italian colonies were spread out, contrasting with the concentrated Little Italy communities found in larger cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Though the report describes this impediment in context with Italian culture in general, it likely contributed to the Alabama Family's inability to survive into the modern era. Mafia Families tended to form in tight-knit Sicilian colonies but thrived and survived in pan-Italian communities that provided them with social infrastructure, deeper

recruitment pools, and diverse economic and criminal opportunities, allowing mafia organizations to build on themselves from one generation to the next. These larger urban Families also recruited mainland Italian criminals some of whom once had their own analogous organizations.

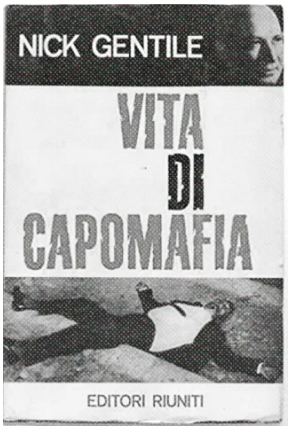
The report on Birmingham Italians states that Alabama's various Sicilian colonies unsurprisingly held feasts for the patron saints of the following villages: Bisacquino, Campofranco, and San Giuseppe Jato, these feasts being a hallmark of Italian ethnic identity that brought the community together. These early generations of immigrants in Birmingham were also said to consider themselves "Sicilitani", "Bisacquinari", and "Campofrancesi" [sic] rather than "Italiani", hometown signifiers that informed the clannish Sicilians' identities far more than their relatively recent inclusion into the broader pan-Italian identities developing in both Italy and the United States.

Bisacquino's Saint Rosalia was celebrated in Alabama.

These hometown-based descriptions that various *compaesani* used for themselves factored heavily into mafia politics, with numerous sources throughout the United States even in later decades referring to factionalism within Cosa Nostra Families based on hometown and region. These terms were famously used during the Castellammarese War in New York City in 1930 through 1931, the name of the war itself drawing from the name for Sicilians from the town of Castellammare del Golfo in Trapani province. Nicola Gentile even described the opposing faction as the Sciacchitani, a reference to the Agrigento village of Sciacca. These regional identities formed the basis for the mafia's sub-networks and patterns of association. Birds of a feather flocked together and these flocks were primarily *compaesani*, many of them interrelated.

Nicola Gentile, a senior representative of an extensive Agrigento mafia network active between the early 1900s and 1930s, wrote an invaluable memoir and obsessively refers to the hometown and ethnic identities of Cosa Nostra members he knew in the United States. When Gentile transferred membership to the Gambino Family in the early 1930s he was designated by boss Vincenzo Mangano, a Palermitano, as his *sostituto* (substitute) tasked

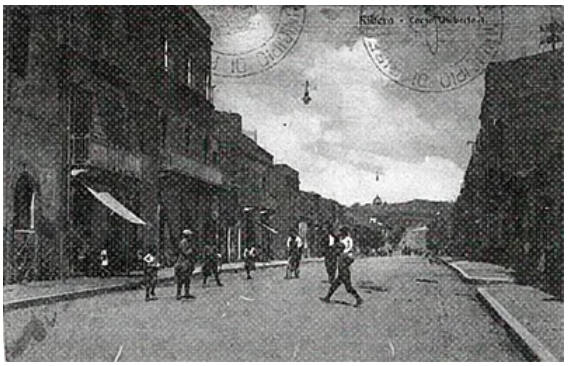
with mediating affairs within the Family's insular Agrigento faction in Manhattan which comprised multiple Family crews. The men from Agrigento were given a great deal of autonomy in part due to a *compaesano* identity that was distinct from that of the Palermitani who ran the Family they all formally belonged to. Mafia *compaesani* groups maintained both comradery and rivalry within their own element, with the Birmingham Italian report showing this was not exclusive to Cosa Nostra but a core part of *sicilianismo*.



Gentile's memoir emphasizes hometown identity in mafia politics.

The report states that Alabama's Sicilian immigrants strongly preferred *compaesani* from their home villages and there was a "chauvanism" expressed with the word *campanilismo*, translated in the report as "my village is better than yours." This was short-lived, though, as the wider culture of Alabama that surrounded these Alabama colonies forced Sicilians to adopt a more general Italian-American identity that prevented individual *paesani* identities from influencing the core Italian community long-term like we see in other US cities.

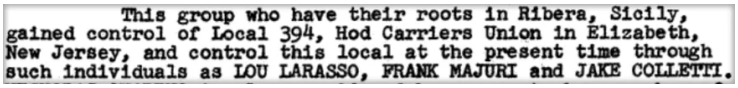
In the New Jersey DeCavalcante Family for example, which was largely comprised of immigrants from Ribera and nearby Agrigento villages, the group still echoes aspects of this *campanilismo*, having actively recruited men from Ribera into the modern era. The DeCavalcantes have maintained an insular organization that interacts with nearby New York and includes members there but the Family remains quiet and sequestered, much like Birmingham's historic Sicilian colonies. The DeCavalcante Family in fact had mafia *compaesani* in Alabama who lived in Russellville and Birmingham, these Riberesi appearing to serve an important role in the organization that will be elaborated on later, though Russellville's remote location shows them to be just as aloof as their peers in New Jersey. Interestingly, the Riberesi are not mentioned in the report on Birmingham Italians referenced in this section, though other documentation proves their existence.



Ribera funneled obscure immigrants to parts of Alabama.

We can use our knowledge of the DeCavalcante Family to understand these mafiosi from Ribera who ended up in Alabama and this article will also explore the history of the DeCavalcante Family as it is inseparable from the Alabama Riberesi. The DeCavalcantes did have criminal activities but when the FBI first learned of them as a distinct New York-New Jersey Family in the 1960s, in part through clandestine recordings made in boss Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante's office (while Western Sicilian, DeCavalcante was not Riberese), it was revealed that much of the membership was comprised of older men from shadowy Agrigento.

Most of these Agrigentino DeCavalcante members in New Jersey as well as New York were laborers for the Family-controlled Local 394 union and the primary perk of mafia membership in Elizabeth was preferential treatment in the Local. While not lawful adherents of the American legal system, these were not master criminals and some of them engaged in no crime at all beyond occasional labor bullying. Due to the tendency for certain *compaesani* groups to share a similar mindset, we can use the DeCavalcantes to better understand Riberese mafiosi in Alabama.


This group who have their roots in Ribera, Sicily, gained control of Local 394, Hod Carriers Union in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and control this local at the present time through such individuals as LOU LARASSO, FRANK MAJURI and JAKE COLLETTI.

The DeCavalcante Family's identity is heavily linked to Ribera.

Though it sits in a different province, Ribera is geographically close to prominent Birmingham Sicilian hometowns like Bisacquino and Campofranco. Former Gambino *capodecina* Michael DiLeonardo states that his grandfather Vincenzo, an early Gambino *capodecina* himself from Bisacquino, was close to men from Ribera in New York City due to this regional proximity, so Ribera is hardly out of place among other Sicilian villages like Bisacquino that produced heavy concentrations of Alabama residents.

Between 1900 and 1910 the Italian population in Birmingham more than tripled. Newspaper reports from early in the century reveal intensive efforts

to bring Italian laborers to Birmingham and other southern cities. However, immigration reform in 1917 greatly reduced Italian immigration and likely dealt a major blow to mafia growth in the area. Along with a cultural climate that limited Sicilian and for that matter Italian identity, it makes sense that the Alabama Family disbanded less than two decades after immigration was stunted by these legal changes. In contrast with Birmingham, other American cities received a major influx of Sicilian and Italian immigrants during the 1920s and even into later decades, these waves of immigration naturally including Sicilian Cosa Nostra members and others molded by the mafia subculture.

There was no central leader of the Birmingham Italian community according to the report on Birmingham's historic Italians, this role often referred to as a *padrone*, but the following men were said to carry out select duties in the community: Egidio Sabatini was the arrival contact for most Italians in Birmingham and helped them find housing; food importer Paul Tuscano helped immigrants with legal problems; GA Firpo was a New Orleans Italian Embassy Vice-Consul based in Birmingham who helped represent immigrants within local government and facilitated communication with the Italian government; Jake Guercio, a barber, led local Italian mutual-aid societies and was a contact with the "business elite"; and physicians Louis Cocciola, Louis Botta, PT Falletta, and dentist BF Sapienza were other influential community figures.

Guercio was from Cefalu, Falletta from Campofranco, and Sapienza from Gratteri but the other leaders' names do not appear to be Sicilian. There is no reason to suspect the three Sicilians of mafia association but other cities in the United States show it was not uncommon for ostensibly legitimate figures in the Sicilian community to be members and leaders of the local Cosa Nostra organization, exerting themselves more within their own small communities where the mafia system was well-understood. Many *compaesani*-based fraternal societies and clubs carried Cosa Nostra members and leaders as administrators and chairmen, the DeCavalcante Family's Ribera Club in Elizabeth being a well-known example but only one of many.

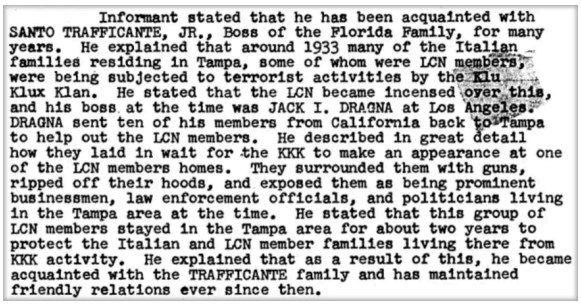
The Ribera Club is a longtime fixture in DeCavalcante circles.

Prejudice was prevalent in Birmingham. In 1905, Birmingham congressman Oscar Underwood spoke out against Italians because they were not of the "Aryan race." He stated that Italians, Spaniards, Greeks, and Assyrians had mixed blood from Asia and Africa, therefore Anglo-Saxons should not intermingle with them. There was significant discrimination against Italians by local Anglo-Saxons that dominated Birmingham and Underwood proposed strict immigration reform that limited "non-Aryans" in the years to come and specifically targeted Italians, while Scandinavians, Germans, and Brits were free to arrive in larger numbers.

The Ku Klux Klan in Birmingham reportedly targeted Italians because of their darker complexion, this taking place between the years 1915 and 1930. The Klan also severely cracked down on bootleggers during Prohibition, which began earlier in Birmingham than the rest of the country. While the public often mistakes bootlegging for the genesis of American Cosa Nostra, it nonetheless provided most US Families with an infusion of wealth and power, these groups utilizing their existing national networks and organizational structure to rapidly gain influence over the illegal alcohol industry. Sicilian mafiosi expanded their network during this period to include a wider range of Italians and even non-Italians who engaged in bootlegging and other emerging criminal activities, a luxury less affordable to mafiosi in oppressive Birmingham.

San Diego-based Los Angeles member and prolific FBI informant Frank Bompensiero told the FBI he was sent to Tampa by his “incensed” boss Jack Dragna around 1933 to assist the Florida organization in their efforts to combat the Ku Klux Klan. He stated that an armed group of Los Angeles members ambushed Klan members who were descending on a Tampa member’s house and exposed the perpetrators’ identities, local community figures among them. He said this Los Angeles mafia element remained in

Tampa for two years to continue protecting local Cosa Nostra members from the Klan.

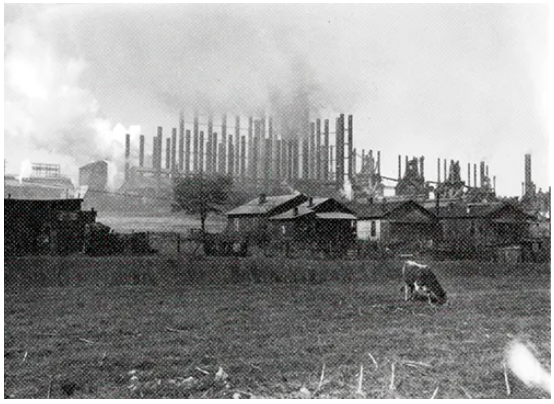


Informant stated that he has been acquainted with SANTO TRAFFICANTE, JR., Boss of the Florida Family, for many years. He explained that around 1933 many of the Italian families residing in Tampa, some of whom were LCN members, were being subjected to terrorist activities by the Klu Klux Klan. He stated that the LCN became incensed over this, and his boss at the time was JACK I. DRAGNA at Los Angeles. DRAGNA sent ten of his members from California back to Tampa to help out the LCN members. He described in great detail how they laid in wait for the KKK to make an appearance at one of the LCN members homes. They surrounded them with guns, ripped off their hoods, and exposed them as being prominent businessmen, law enforcement officials, and politicians living in the Tampa area at the time. He stated that this group of LCN members stayed in the Tampa area for about two years to protect the Italian and LCN member families living there from KKK activity. He explained that as a result of this, he became acquainted with the TRAFFICANTE family and has maintained friendly relations ever since then.

The national Cosa Nostra network helped Tampa combat the KKK.

The Los Angeles and Tampa Families have few known connections and were formed by different *compaesani* groups on opposite sides of the country, but as Frank Bompensiero's account shows, the mafia was deeply interconnected and invested in one another's well-being in different locations. A lack of insight into the Alabama Family makes it impossible to know if they were offered similar support from national Cosa Nostra groups in resisting the Klan's violent bigotry, but the Klan's reported policing of local bootlegging activities indicates that mafiosi were significantly handicapped by these outside forces in the Birmingham area if indeed they sought to engage in illegal alcohol distribution like their national peers. The Ku Klux Klan and police alike even accosted Italians and other immigrants for ignoring the Sabbath on Sundays, showing that it was not just illegal activity the Klan targeted but all customs not in line with the Anglo-Saxon majority.

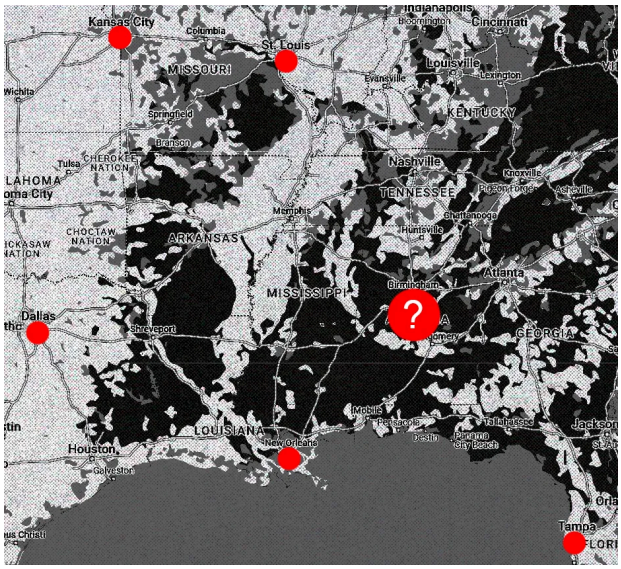
Though the report on Birmingham's Italian history sheds no direct light on its Cosa Nostra organization, indeed the report makes no reference to the mafia at all, the information presented in the report greatly informs our understanding of its local mafia group. With 90% of its Italian population descending from Sicily, particularly regions dense with Cosa Nostra activity dating back to the 1800s, it is unsurprising that a formal mafia group formed there, just as it is equally unsurprising that its lifespan was cut short by the factors discussed here.



The mafia was unsustainable in Birmingham.

The Birmingham Family's inability to sustain itself was undoubtedly influenced by crackdowns on Italian immigration in the late 1910s, which had a dramatic impact on Birmingham's Italian colonies during the 1920s when the rest of the US mafia got a new wave of recruits from Sicily. The Italian community was also decentralized and spread out in several different colonies and the Klan's harsh opposition to bootlegging and foreign ethnicities prevented Birmingham Italians from thriving as Italian communities did elsewhere. Anglo-Saxon discrimination toward Italians in local government and social life forced Italians to assimilate and abandon much of their independent identity or leave the area.

We don't know if Bill Bonanno's word-of-mouth reference to the mid-1930s disbandment of Birmingham is the exact time of the Family's dissolution, but the known history of Italians in Birmingham fits perfectly with the idea of an early mafia Family who couldn't maintain their organization in this environment. We lack information on the formative years of the Family, too, making it difficult to understand the group's exact genesis, nor do we know how potent the group was earlier in its history. There is evidence New Orleans was a fully-functioning mafia city by the 1860s, with cities like St. Louis, Tampa, Dallas, Chicago, and San Francisco showing similar trends before the turn of the 20th century, making the Alabama Family perhaps older than we know given the presence of Western Sicilian immigrants by the 1890s



Alabama's location places it in Southern and Midwest mafia networks.

Thus far this article has attempted to contextualize the local environment of Birmingham as it relates to Alabama's immigrant Italian colonies, providing substance in the form of Sicilian hometowns with an enduring mafia pedigree and circumstances that could and did facilitate the existence of a recognized Family even if this arrangement was unsustainable. These circumstantial factors are of marginal use without specific people, though. Bill Bonanno did not provide any names connected to the Birmingham group despite his apparent knowledge of one member's advanced age, but fortunately other material has assisted in identifying possible members, associates, and perhaps even one of the Family's leaders.

Pasquale Amari & Riberese Mafia Clans

A remote colony of immigrants from Ribera in Russellville, Alabama, 110 miles from Birmingham, interestingly has given us names and connections that have helped us understand who was involved with the mafia in Alabama. One of these men had a surname and hometown familiar to Cosa Nostra researchers and his involvement in a mafia-like crime in his native Sicily prior to entering the United States is further indication that this man was a mafioso. His story also reflects the kinship ties that are so essential to Cosa Nostra's existence.

Pasquale Amari was born in Ribera in 1865 to Giovanni Amari and Giuseppa Schittone, residents of the same village that produced Filippo "Phil" Amari, the first confirmed DeCavalcante Family *rappresentante* in New Jersey who served through the mid-1950s, as well as Phil's relative Gioacchino "Jake" Amari, who served as underboss and acting boss of the same Family decades later in the 1990s. Phil Amari's father Giuseppe was the brother of Jake Amari's grandfather, named Gioacchino like him. Though a blood relation can't be

confirmed at present, Pasquale was related to this branch at least through marriage which will be explored in further detail later.

Both of the New Jersey Amaris maintained close ties to Ribera and traveled back there while residing in the United States, Phil Amari even being accompanied by Riberese mafiosi from Chicago during a 1948 visit and Jake Amari reportedly meeting with Ribera Family members during at least one of his own visits. Another native of Ribera named Nicolo Amari was identified by authorities as a Sicilian mafia figure living in Florida into the 1990s where he associated with members of the Tampa and DeCavalcante Families. The Amari name is said to be among the first known surnames established in the village of Ribera, though it took on various forms including Amaro, D'Amari, and D'Amaro.

Pasquale Amari's surname is featured prominently in Cosa Nostra.

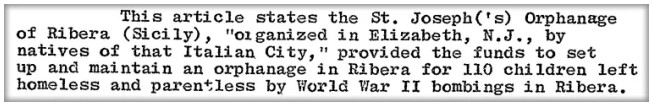
Between 1893 and 1903, Pasquale Amari served approximately ten years in prison after having been convicted of murder in Ribera. Amari stabbed a man to death at a card game in a Ribera cafe in connection with a gambling debt. The murder appeared to be pre-meditated though available information does not elaborate on the full context of the killing beyond it being related to gambling and money. The alleged motivation for the murder suggests Pasquale Amari either had a stake in the gambling game as a participant or organizer, or perhaps he loaned the victim money. Amari was described as having a shortened index finger, the cause of the injury unknown but it occurred prior to his incarceration.

Pasquale Amari's wife, ten years his junior and only fifteen when they married, was Giuseppa Schittone, whose mother was a Giacobbe. The couple was married in 1890, around three years prior to his murder conviction and prison sentence. Schittone was likely a cousin of Amari, as Amari's mother shared the name Giuseppa Schittone. While an exact relation to the Schittone-Giacobbes can't be determined, the Giacobbe surname connects to Riberese mafiosi in the US and Sicily much as the Amari name does.

Amari (L) and wife Schittone (R) were married in Ribera.

Lorenzo Giacobbe was identified as an early DeCavalcante *capodecina* by former New York-based captain-turned-cooperator Anthony Rotondo, with Lorenzo's son Joseph also gaining membership and serving as an acting *capodecina* when Rotondo was active. These Giacobbes lived in Manhattan, Queens, and Connecticut during different periods, all locations linked to the DeCavalcante Family in addition to the group's eventual headquarters in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Two relatives of the DeCavalcante Giacobbes, Emanuele Giacobbe and his son Leonardo, were identified as made members in Ribera, with investigations in the United States indicating Leonardo Giacobbe transferred his membership to the DeCavalcantes upon moving to New Jersey, a formal practice not entirely uncommon between the two intertwined transatlantic Families who share common lineage. Historic mafia journeyman Nicola Gentile transferred membership between Cosa Nostra organizations in the United States and Agrigento himself generations earlier. Anthony Rotondo recalled how several made members of both the DeCavalcante and Ribera Families transferred their membership back and forth depending on where they lived.

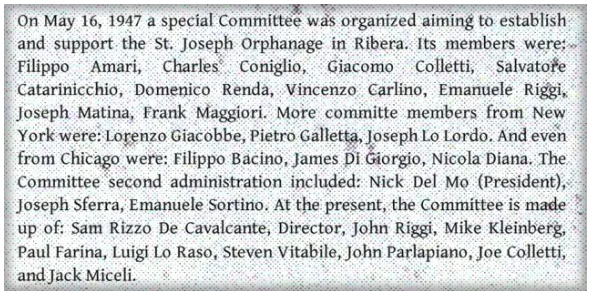
The DeCavalcante Giacobbes were also possible marital relatives of Chicago Family member Filippo “Phil” Bacino, who belonged to a powerful faction of Riberese mafiosi in Illinois who were closely linked to the DeCavalcantes. Bacino's professed “uncle” and arrival contact when he arrived to New York City from Ribera in 1923 was Carmelo Giacobbe, the elder brother and uncle of Lorenzo and Joseph Giacobbe, respectively. Phil Bacino spent only a brief time in New York before moving to Chicago and eventually nearby Calumet City but he retained a close relationship to DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari, with Bacino and two other Riberese mafiosi from Chicago participating in the New Jersey Ribera Club's orphanage committee with Amari and other DeCavalcante members, including Bacino’s possible relative Lorenzo Giacobbe. Phil Bacino’s son would also marry a girl from Elizabeth he met while attending the wedding of DeCavalcante leader Frank Majuri’s daughter in New Jersey.


This article states the St. Joseph('s) Orphanage of Ribera (Sicily), "organized in Elizabeth, N.J., by natives of that Italian City," provided the funds to set up and maintain an orphanage in Ribera for 110 children left homeless and parentless by World War II bombings in Ribera.

The Ribera Club helped build a post-World War II orphanage in Ribera.

The aforementioned orphange committee, formed in 1947, was comprised almost entirely of confirmed Cosa Nostra members in New Jersey, New York, and Chicago, with the few remaining names being obscure older figures who, if these patterns are any indication, were possible DeCavalcante members themselves. Mafia figures on the committee from New Jersey included boss Phil Amari and his eventual successor Nick Delmore, as well as Joseph Sferra, Giacomo Colletti, Salvatore Caterinicchio, Emanuele Riggi, and Frank Majuri, who traced his heritage to Corleone but would marry a woman from Ribera. The committee's New York element included Lorenzo Giacobbe, Pietro Galletta, and Joseph Lolordo. Emanuele Sortino, who also sat on the committee, was not a known DeCavalcante member but his family was part of the Ribera Family in Sicily.

This ostensibly legitimate arrangement reflects not only mafia membership but also significant stature in the local Cosa Nostra organization. Amari and Delmore would be Family *rappresentanti*, as noted, while Majuri became an underboss and Sferra, Colletti, Giacobbe, and Lolordo all held the rank of *capodecina* at various points. Caterinicchio was described by a later source as a member of the Family's advisory council and Emanuele Riggi was himself a powerful member whose son John became a Family boss.

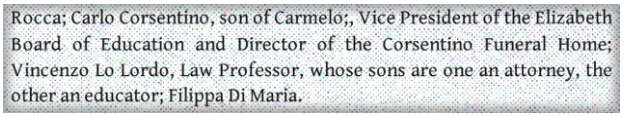

On May 16, 1947 a special Committee was organized aiming to establish and support the St. Joseph Orphanage in Ribera. Its members were: Filippo Amari, Charles Coniglio, Giacomo Colletti, Salvatore Catarinicchio, Domenico Renda, Vincenzo Carlino, Emanuele Riggi, Joseph Matina, Frank Maggiori. More committe members from New York were: Lorenzo Giacobbe, Pietro Galletta, Joseph Lo Lordo. And even from Chicago were: Filippo Bacino, James Di Giorgio, Nicola Diana. The Committee second administration included: Nick Del Mo (President), Joseph Sferra, Emanuele Sortino. At the present, the Committee is made up of: Sam Rizzo De Cavalcante, Director, John Riggi, Mike Kleinberg, Paul Farina, Luigi Lo Raso, Steven Vitabile, John Parlapiano, Joe Colletti, and Jack Miceli.

The Ribera Club committee included mafiosi from NJ, NY, & Chicago.

This Ribera Club committee directly reflects the DeCavalcante Family's hierarchy, with lesser-known committee members Charles Coniglio, Domenico Renda, Vincenzo Carlino, and Joseph Matina being names from Ribera or surrounding areas who were undeniably amenable to Cosa Nostra given the other names among them. A later incarnation of the same committee shows the same tendency and included Family boss Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante, Sam's underboss and eventual successor John Riggi, *consigliere* Stefano Vitabile, *capodecina* Paolo Farina, former underboss and *capodecina*

Louis LaRasso, and member Joseph Colletti (son of Giacomo, previous committee member), who may have been a *capodecina* for a time as well.

Another committee member during the Rizzo DeCavalcante era was Gioacchino "Jack" Miceli. Miceli was not a formal part of Cosa Nostra but his first cousin Alfonso Miceli was a made member in Ribera and Jack Miceli was president of the Ribera Club itself, also being married to a Riggi. His obituary states he helped 75 different people immigrate to the United States, no doubt many of them from Ribera. Jack Miceli was buried at the Corsentino Funeral Home in Elizabeth, a facility operated by second-generation DeCavalcante member Carl Corsentino who is entirely legitimate and even served as Vice President of the local Board of Education.


Rocca; Carlo Corsentino, son of Carmelo;, Vice President of the Elizabeth Board of Education and Director of the Corsentino Funeral Home; Vincenzo Lo Lordo, Law Professor, whose sons are one an attorney, the other an educator; Filippa Di Maria.

The reputable Corsentino is a fully-initiated Cosa Nostra member.

An unknown name on the later committee was Joseph Parlapiano, his surname heavily linked to Agrigento. Nicola Gentile's *capodecina* in the New York Gambino Family at one time was another man named Giuseppe Parlapiano from Sciacca. One name on the committee that can be discounted from mafia membership rolls entirely is the non-Italian Mike Kleinberg, though Kleinberg was a key Family associate who held an important managerial position with the DeCavalcante-controlled Local 394, showing him to be far from an ordinary "civilian". The committee's goals were charitable but it was indistinguishable from the DeCavalcante Family's own organizational structure and it was represented by the most important mafiosi in the American branch of the Riberese mafia network.

The committee was organized because the Ribera Club had sponsored the construction of an orphanage in their native Ribera, which the club continued to hold annual fundraisers for during the next 50 years. Former Family associate Frank Scarabino noted that members of the Ribera Family traveled to the United States for these fundraising events even in recent decades, showing the Ribera orphanage to be a joint effort between Riberese mafiosi in the US and Sicily consistently since its formation. The Sicily-based brother of DeCavalcante soldier Pietro Galletta, Francesco, was the mayor of Ribera in the 1960s and was referenced in a newspaper account discussing the Elizabeth group's involvement with the orphanage, Pietro sitting on the Ribera Club's committee himself.

The Chicago representatives on the committee reveal how *compaesani* relationships among Riberese mafiosi extended to other US cities. Like most of the New York and New Jersey committee members, all three of the Illinois names were Cosa Nostra figures who descended from Ribera: Phil Bacino, Vincenzo "Jim" DeGeorge (true name DiGiorgi), and Nicola Diana. Bacino and Diana even traveled to Sicily with Phil Amari in 1948 for the orphanage's grand opening. The much older Pasquale Amari who would reside in Alabama was related via marriage to Nicola Diana of Chicago.

Phil Amari (L) and Phil Bacino (R) in Ribera, 1948.

Pasquale Amari's sister Rosaria married Francesco Diana in Ribera and their son Calogero would move to Chicago, where Ribera Club committee member Nicola Diana resided. Calogero Diana's father Francesco was the brother of Nicola's father Vincenzo, making the two men first cousins. Pasquale Amari's nephew Calogero lived on the same block as leading Riberese members of the Chicago Family, including DeGeorge, Pasquale Lolordo (whose brother Joseph also sat on the Ribera Club committee), and Vincenzo "James" D'Angelo. Lolordo became boss of the Chicago Family in 1928 and was subsequently murdered in early 1929, while DeGeorge was a *capodecina* who became involved in an internal conflict within the Family in the 1940s that led to his demotion and semi-retirement to Wisconsin. D'Angelo was murdered in 1944.

Nicola Diana was allegedly no stranger to violence. He was arrested in Chicago in 1940 after nine years of hiding in plain sight and charged with murdering a local police officer in 1931, his car having been connected to the killing. At the time he was arrested, Diana was in the company of Emanuele Cammarata, a New Jersey resident and native of Villabate in Palermo who spent time in Chicago. Both men were in the olive oil business, an industry Cammarata shared with his cousin Joe Profaci, by this time *rappresentante* of a New York Family. Cammarata and Profaci, along with Diana's Chicago *compaesani* Pasquale Lolordo and Phil Bacino, had been arrested together in

1928 at a famed Cleveland meeting attended by top Cosa Nostra members around the country.

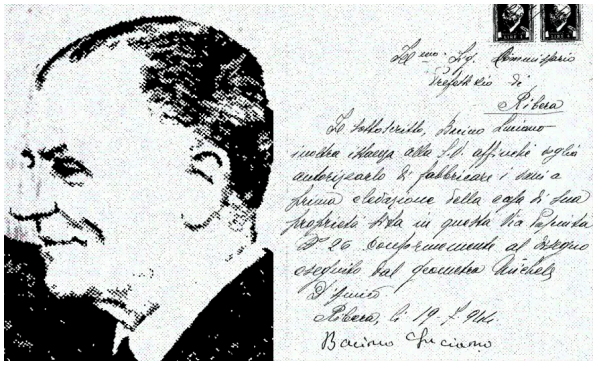
Diana was a Chicago mafioso and part of the Amari clan.

A witness to the police officer's 1931 murder was unable to identify Nicola Diana and he escaped prosecution. By 1947 he was part of the Chicago contingent of the New Jersey Ribera Club's orphanage committee with Phil Bacino as well as Jim DeGeorge, though DeGeorge, who by this time may have fallen from grace in Chicago, did not accompany Amari, Bacino, and Diana to Ribera the following year for the grand opening of the Ribera orphanage. Ostensibly the owner of a Calumet City pizzeria, Phil Bacino had more in common with Nicola Diana than their heritage alone: Bacino was charged with the murder of a former police officer in 1935 though he too escaped proper punishment.

By the time of his voyage to Ribera with Phil Bacino and DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari, Nicola Diana was living in Phoenix, Arizona, a destination for Chicago mafia figures. Amari's brother Vincenzo would also settle in Arizona much later after leaving New Jersey, Vincenzo Amari coming to America after killing a man named Antonio Russo in Ribera in late 1924. Along with his ties to the New Jersey Amaris, Nicola Diana is a confirmed marital relative of Birmingham's Pasquale Amari through his first cousin Calogero, Amari's blood nephew, and Pasquale shared a marital relation to the Giacobbe surname along with Bacino, who clamed Carmelo Giacobbe as an "uncle" when he arrived in America, these men's lives complementing one another in many ways.

That Pasquale Amari stabbed a man to death in Ribera in the early 1890s parallels Phil's brother Vincenzo Amari committing a murder himself in their hometown over 30 years later. Nicola Diana was accused of killing a police officer in Chicago in the 1930s, as was Phil Bacino, showing a violent streak among the Riberesi in the United States as well as Sicily, where this temperament apparently originated. Like his possible marital relatives the Giacobbes' overseas relatives in the Ribera Family, Phil Bacino's brother

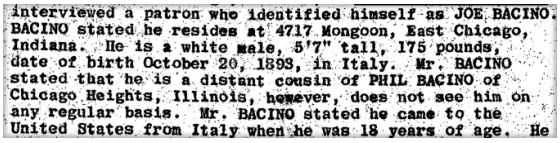
Luciano was identified as a senior mafioso in Ribera by Italian authorities during the 1940s and 1950s. There is high probablity that the Amari, Diana, Giacobbe, and Bacino families trace their roots to older generations of Ribera Family mafiosi, Pasquale Amari being part of this elder group.



Phil Bacino's (L) brother Luciano (letter, R) was a Ribera Family leader.

In 1912, around nine years after Pasquale Amari's release from prison, the 47-year-old ex-convict entered the United States where he listed his arrival contact as Giuseppe Mule, sometimes spelled Muli, the son of his sister who was living in New York City. Accompanying Amari was a Riberese woman returning from a visit to Ribera, Anna Miceli, who previously lived in Tampa. Miceli was at this time heading to Bayonne, New Jersey. The longtime Ribera Club president in Elizabeth described earlier was Jack Miceli from Ribera, the cousin of a Ribera Family mafioso and a member of the club's orphanage committee that included much of the DeCavalcante Family leadership.

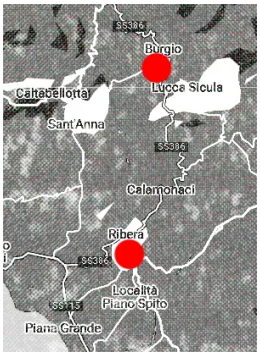
Anna Miceli's mother in Ribera was a Triolo, the same surname as Chicago mafioso Phil Bacino's mother. Further recurrence of these names comes from Bacino's paternal grandmother, a Miceli from nearby Burgio, with the Bacino family later moving to Ribera. It may be through the Triolo name that Phil Bacino was related to the DeCavalcante Giacobbes, with Bacino's own NYC arrival contact a decade later, Carmelo Giacobbe, married to a "Palma Triolo" on his arrival manifest. However, Palma Triolo was the name of Bacino's mother, not Giaccobe's wife, and Carmelo Giaccobe's wife was actually Corinda Parinisi though her mother was a Triolo and she sometimes used the name Corinda Triolo. She was seemingly not Bacino's mother's sister but perhaps a maternal cousin, though the relationship was close enough in some form that Bacino considered Giacobbe an "uncle". That Carmelo Giacobbe listed Phil Bacino's mother's name of Palma Triolo as his "wife" on his own arrival manifest is another curiosity that suggests a close connection between the families. A relative named Triolo was also among Bacino's criminal associates in Illinois and Indiana, as were other Bacinos from Burgio, one of whom told the FBI Phil was a distant relative.


interviewed a patron who identified himself as JOE BACINO. BACINO stated he resides at 4717 Mongoon, East Chicago, Indiana. He is a white male, 5'7" tall, 175 pounds, date of birth October 20, 1893, in Italy. Mr. BACINO stated that he is a distant cousin of PHIL BACINO of Chicago Heights, Illinois, however, does not see him on any regular basis. Mr. BACINO stated he came to the United States from Italy when he was 18 years of age. He

Bacino relatives from Burgio surfaced in Illinois-Indiana mafia circles.

Like the woman's name who accompanied Pasquale Amari to America, DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari also had a maternal aunt named Anna Miceli who married his father's brother, named Filippo like him. There is a discrepancy in ages between this Anna Miceli and the one who accompanied Pasquale Amari to America, indicating this was a different woman or there was a transcription error when the age of the woman traveling with Pasquale Amari was recorded.

The Miceli family Phil Amari's aunt descended from lived in Ribera for multiple generations, making a relation to Phil Bacino's Miceli relatives from Burgio indirect if indeed there is a relation but the Burgio tie-in brings to mind early St. Louis boss Pasquale Miceli, a native of Burgio who lived in Chicago in the 1920s alongside Bacino. A possible early Chicago boss was Pietro Catalanotto from Villafranca Sicula, directly between Ribera and Burgio, though he was murdered in the mid-1910s before these men arrived to the city. Another common surname between Phil Bacino and Pasquale Amari is Mule, a name related to Bacino's father Giovanni's family again in Burgio.

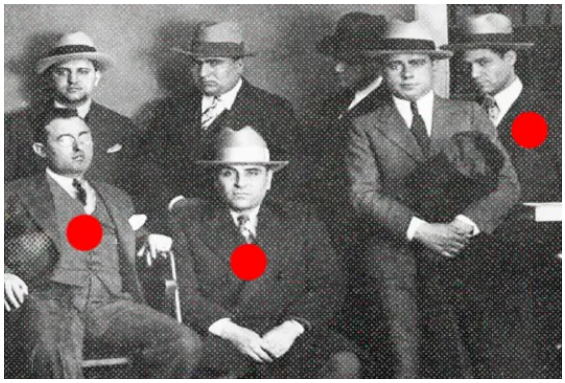


Ribera (bottom) and Burgio (top).

A future Riberese Chicago mafia boss was living in New York City at the time Pasquale Amari arrived there in 1912: Pasquale Lolordo, the future neighbor of Amari's nephew Calogero Diana in Chicago prior to Lolordo's 1929 murder. Lolordo was married to the daughter of a Domenico Mule, who also lived in New York at the time and shares his surname with the nephew Pasquale Amari arrived to in NYC, Giuseppe Mule. Tying these names tighter together is Lolordo's close association with Phil Bacino, the two men arrested together at the 1928 Cleveland meeting alongside Joe Profaci of New York and his

cousin Emanuele “Nello” Cammarata of New Jersey, the latter noted for being with Nicola Diana during the latter’s 1940 arrest in Chicago.

Lolordo’s title as Chicago *rappresentante* at the time makes his attendance easily understood, though the presence of Lolordo and Bacino together may have had more significance when considering the importance of *compaesani* ties in mafia politics. Other Chicago area figures also attended, including high-level figures from the town of Cinisi, suggesting there was representation from different Sicilian factions. Pasquale Lolordo likely headed the national Riberese network at this time given his stature in Chicago.



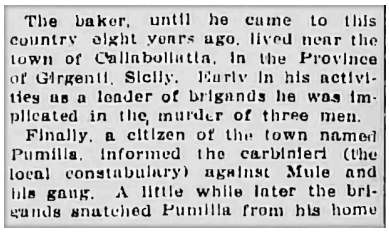
1928: Profaci (L), Lolordo (C), and Nicola Diana’s friend Cammarata (R).

Pasquale Lolordo's in-laws the Mules descended from Caltabellotta, a *comune* near Ribera and Burgio that produced DeCavalcante members, including New Jersey-based *capodecina* Paolo Farina and two men suspected by the FBI of being members of the Family’s Manhattan-Queens faction, the Marsala brothers. Pasquale Amari’s 1912 arrival to the United States included a Giuliano Farina from Caltabellotta on the same ship. Farina was later connected to the Marsala brothers, his *paesani* with the DeCavalcante Family, and he was likely a relative of Paolo, having a brother of the same name. As with Ribera and Burgio, intermarriage between the villages of Ribera and Caltabellotta was not uncommon and the same surnames surface in both villages.

An early mafia figure from Caltabellotta named Pellegrino Mule also lived in Manhattan in the early 20th century, being linked to so-called "Black Hand" extortion in the city circa 1908. This Mule was wanted by Italian authorities for three murders in Sicily, having killed one of these men in Sciacca, a prominent village on the coast near Caltabellotta and Ribera that produced a large amount of the Gambino Family’s Agrigento faction, many of which had ties to the same Manhattan neighborhoods Mule frequented.

Pellegrino Mule, a baker by trade, was identified as the leader of a group of terroristic bandits in Sicily prior to his arrival in New York City with

implications he was a mafia leader in the hills of Caltabellotta before absconding to New York. His heritage and stature would have placed him in the networks discussed here and his surname connects to Pasquale Amari and Pasquale Lolordo, coming from the same miniscule village as Lolordo's in-laws who share his name. One of the men he allegedly killed in Sicily was decapitated, showing Mule to be capable of far more than baking bread. Interestingly too, his nephew was named Trafficante like the well-known Tampa leaders who came from another Western Agrigento village, Cianciana, though there is no apparent connection between them.


The baker, until he came to this country eight years ago, lived near the town of Callabollatta, in the Province of Girgenti, Sicily. Early in his activities as a leader of brigands he was implicated in the murder of three men.

Finally, a citizen of the town named Pumilia, informed the carbinieri (the local constabulary) against Mule and his gang. A little while later the brigands snatched Pumilia from his home

Mule was a savage underworld figure from Caltabellotta, near Ribera.

Along with Paquale Lolordo marrying a Mule from Caltabellotta, his brother Joseph married a woman named Cascio in Los Angeles, her father Vito coming from Lucca Sicula, a village between Ribera and Burgio that produced Pueblo Family leaders along with Burgio. Joseph LoLordo's brother-in-law was Carl Cascio, who after living in New Jersey and Los Angeles ended up in Colorado where he was later identified as a suspected Pueblo member, his own father-in-law being Calogero Parlapiano, an early Pueblo mafia figure. An obscure New Jersey-based Bonanno Family *capodecina*, Giuseppe Colletti, was from Lucca Sicula, as was his cousin Vincenzo "Jim" Colletti, an ex-Bonanno member who moved to Colorado and became the local *rappresentante*. This Bonanno group, which included Angelo Salvo with heritage in Alessandria della Rocca, had close relationships to the DeCavalcantes and Giuseppe Colletti's brother-in-law and successor Angelo Caruso, from Leonforte in Enna, was among Frank Rizzo DeCavalcante's intimate friends.

Pasquale's brother Joseph Lolordo eventually became a DeCavalcante *capodecina* in Queens, having left Chicago after his brother Pasquale's 1929 murder. Joseph Lolordo's in-laws the Cascios lived in Linden, New Jersey, prior to living in Los Angeles where the Lolordo-Cascio marriage took place, Linden being the home of many DeCavalcante members who belonged to the nearby Elizabeth organization. Phil Amari would himself move to Los Angeles where he died of natural causes in 1963 after being deposed as DeCavalcante boss, his son-in-law being Los Angeles member Salvatore Pinelli, whose father Tony had been an Indiana-based *capodecina* of the Chicago Family before transferring to Los Angeles. Tony Pinelli was from Calascibetta in Enna

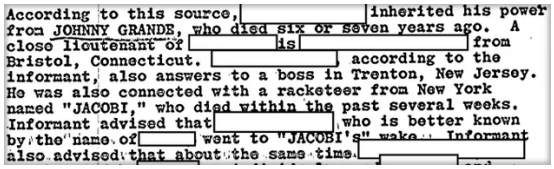
province, the same region that produced Amari's successor Nick Delmore, but he was related to the Riberesi on two fronts, another son marrying the daughter of fellow Chicago *capodecina* and Ribera Club committee member Jim DeGeorge.

By 1930, Joseph Lolordo and his wife were living with his widowed sister-in-law, Pasquale's wife, and her father Domenico Mule in Queens. Phil Bacino's possible relatives the Giacobbes would live in this same part of Queens and maintained a close relationship to Joseph Lolordo. Despite living in New York City, both the Giacobbes and Lolordo were closely involved with Local 394 in Elizabeth and Joe Lolordo's in-laws' previous residence in Linden shows them to be part of these circles as well.

Linden, outside of Elizabeth, was a major destination in this network.

Though Bacino was not in the United States when Pasquale Amari arrived to his nephew in New York, nor was Bacino's "uncle" Carmelo Giacobbe, Carmelo's brother Lorenzo of the future DeCavalcante Family was living in Lower Manhattan in 1911. By 1917, Lorenzo Giacobbe had moved to Hartford, Connecticut.

Eventually a DeCavalcante Family underboss, Joseph LaSelva, as well as *capodecina* Mickey Puglia were identified as Connecticut-based members of the organization, an unintuitive arrangement that would be virtually impossible to identify without inside sources. The Family's Connecticut leaders were not Sicilian, but the earlier presence of Lorenzo Giacobbe in the state, where a small Ribera colony existed at the time, potentially helped lay a DeCavalcante foundation in the area that eventually included local recruits who took on important positions. An FBI informant in the 1960s seemed to refer to the recently deceased Giacobbe in a report about Connecticut activities, further supporting this theory.

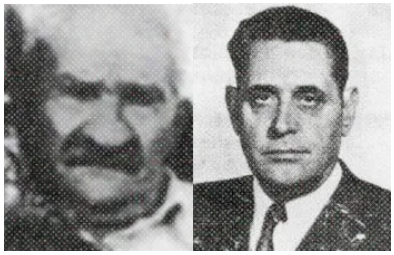

According to this source, [redacted] inherited his power from JOHNNY GRANDE, who died six or seven years ago. A close lieutenant of [redacted] is [redacted] from Bristol, Connecticut. [redacted] according to the informant, also answers to a boss in Trenton, New Jersey. He was also connected with a racketeer from New York named "JACOBI," who died within the past several weeks. Informant advised that [redacted] who is better known by the name of [redacted] went to "JACOBI's" wake. Informant also advised that about the same time [redacted]

An informant linked “Jacobi” (Giacobbe) to Connecticut.

As with Connecticut, the contemporary Ribera network was planting its seeds in other unlikely locations in the early 20th century. Following his 1912 arrival in NYC, Pasquale Amari soon traveled to Alabama where his sister and brother-in-law Giuseppe Caterinicchia were already living as farmers. Amari's family would arrive approximately one year after he settled in Alabama and Pasquale joined his brother-in-law in the agriculture trade, soon starting his own farm in Russellville.

Living in Alabama alongside Pasquale Amari at this time was Giuseppa Amari Mangiaracina, the sister of DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari’s father Giuseppe and therefore not only Phil’s aunt but also the great-aunt of Jake Amari, being the sister as well of Jake’s namesake grandfather Gioacchino. Giuseppa’s husband Giuseppe Mangiaracina descended not from Ribera but Castelvetrano in Trapani. The presence of Phil Amari’s aunt in Alabama with Pasquale Amari, specifically in tiny Russellville, provides evidence of a relationship between the two Amari branches but the relationship grew even tighter in Russellville.

The son of Giuseppa Amari and Giuseppe Mangiaracina, Vincenzo, married Pasquale Amari’s daughter Mary in Birmingham in 1928, meaning Phil Amari’s first cousin was married to Pasquale Amari’s daughter. This union confirms that Pasquale Amari’s grandchildren would become blood relatives of Phil and Jake Amari through their paternal grandmother, though a relation between the two Amari families likely already existed based on the marriage alone and common chain migration patterns that brought both Amari branches from Ribera to the same obscure farming community in Alabama.

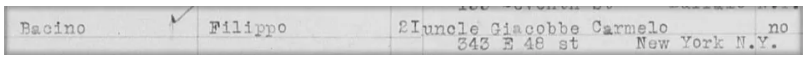


Pasquale (L) and Phil (R) Amari were related through marriage if not more.

A descendant of Pasquale Amari described how the small number of families in Ribera and extensive intermarriage between them over generations made

virtually everyone with the same surname a cousin to varying degrees. This is not lost on modern mafia members from Ribera. Trenton-based DeCavalcante member Girolamo Guarraggi's funeral service was aired online, his brother commenting how Girolamo was obsessed with Sicilian hometowns and when meeting other immigrants the mafioso could tell them who all of their relatives are without having previously met them. Girolamo Guarraggi was another ostensibly legitimate DeCavalcante member who had been part of the same New Jersey Board of Education that once carried DeCavalcante member Carl Corsentino as its president.

These connections would have been even more familiar to early generations of immigrants like Pasquale and Phil Amari, whose relation has been substantiated via marriage even though the exact blood relation of Pasquale Amari's father Giovanni to Phil's ancestors is currently unknown. Phil Amari himself would arrive to America in 1921, the same year Carmelo Giacobbe came to New York from Ribera and two years before Phil Bacino arrived to his "uncle" Giacobbe. Carmelo Giacobbe, born in 1874, has never been identified as a made member of the DeCavalcantes like his brother Lorenzo and nephew Joseph, his advanced age obscuring him from later sources, but the additional involvement of his "nephew" Phil Bacino as a member of the Chicago Family places Carmelo deep within Riberese mafia circles even though his own role remains a mystery.


Bacino Filippo 21 uncle Giacobbe Carmelo no
343 E 48 st New York N.Y.

Bacino's "uncle" Carmelo Giacobbe is an enigma.

Carmelo Giacobbe is the eldest known figure from his clan to live in the United States and was only nine years younger than Pasquale Amari, whose wife's mother was a Giacobbe. Though Carmelo was living in Ribera prior to his 1921 arrival to New York City, he may have visited New York many years earlier, a man with his name and age arriving in 1906 to a cousin named LaSala, another surname that produced a Riberese DeCavalcante member. If this is the same Carmelo Giacobbe, his stay was not permanent and he returned to Ribera for a period. There is a high degree of probability that Carmelo Giacobbe and Pasquale Amari were contemporaries in the Ribera Family before both men arrived in America.

What is known of Pasquale Amari's wife's maternal heritage does not reveal an obvious connection to Carmelo Giacobbe despite her mother being a Giacobbe. Indication of common lineage does come through the name of Pasquale Amari's wife's grandfather, Emanuele Giacobbe. Carmelo and Lorenzo Giacobbe had a brother named Emanuele and as noted earlier,

Lorenzo and his son Joe had another relative made into the Ribera Family named Emanuele Giacobbe. Sicilian naming traditions utilize the same given names from generation to generation and though a connection appears distant these shared names could suggest common lineage between Pasquale Amari's wife and the DeCavalcante Giacobbes.

Joe Giacobbe's family produced members in New York and Ribera.

Pasquale Amari's connections invoke the names of other Cosa Nostra figures from Ribera, this winding genealogical road and its many detours into New York, New Jersey, and Chicago showing confirmed and possible relationships between many different mafia figures in Ribera and throughout the United States. The murder of a man at a gambling game in Amari's hometown is further evidence of his participation in mafia-like activity. However, it is not Pasquale Amari who was the most significant Ribera-born mafia figure in Alabama, rather it appears this status belonged to his brother-in-law Giuseppe Caterinicchia. Caterinicchia's ties to Cosa Nostra figures are less incidental and he can be directly linked to two of the most important mafia leaders in America during the 1920s.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia & the National Mafia Network

Giuseppe Caterinicchia was born in 1861 and descended from Ribera like his brother-in-law Pasquale Amari, having married Pasquale's sister Antonia in Sicily. Arriving to the United States via New Orleans in 1897 or 1898 (records state both), many years before Amari's own arrival, Caterinicchia would settle in Alabama where he established a farm in remote Russellville. Caterinicchia maintained a presence in Birmingham, with Giuseppe and many of the Caterinicchia-Amari clan relatives eventually living in and around the city after leaving Russellville. Investigation into other Cosa Nostra figures also reveals that Giuseppe Caterinicchia received mail from high-ranking mafiosi at a Birmingham address.

Caterinicchia definitively links Alabama to national Cosa Nostra leaders.

A 1923 Secret Service record shows mail communication between Giuseppe Caterinicchia and Boston-based New England boss Gaspare Messina, who would later become interrim *capo dei capi* in 1930 after Joe Masseria was deposed and eventually killed the following year. Messina sent Caterinicchia $77.50 to a Birmingham address, a sum that would be worth over $1162 today. While not a small amount of money, neither is the total massive within the scope of underworld activity.

The nature of this payment is unknown, though it indicates a shared business interest or that Messina was otherwise lending support to Caterinicchia. Cross-country partnerships between members were formed around counterfeiting in the early part of the century, with mafiosi using these same networks for bootlegging during the 1920s when Messina sent the money to Caterinicchia, though mafia leaders were also known to utilize the same relationships for legitimate business partnerships or to lend each other general assistance. These networks weren't formed by specific activities, rather Cosa Nostra used its existing networks for whatever activity they were currently engaged in, be it legitimate, criminal, or simply social.

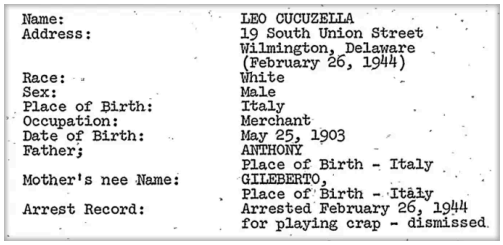
Gaspare Messina descended from Salemi, an inland village in Trapani province just over 50 miles from Giuseppe Caterinicchia's hometown of Ribera. Messina had no known presence in Alabama, nor did Caterinicchia have established ties to New England, but the mafia network was intricate and even without close association mafia members communicated via letter, attended national *Assemblea Generale* meetings in various locations, and knew one another by reputation if not personal acquaintance. Nicola Gentile, who was well-acquainted with Gaspare Messina, also provides a common link between Messina and Caterinicchia.

Messina (L) & Gentile (R) can be linked to Caterinicchia.

Nicola Gentile was well-traveled in both America and Sicily. A native of Siculiana, a town in Agrigento with close ties to Ribera, Gentile was inducted into Cosa Nostra in the United States, transferring membership into various US Families through his nomadic movements . He also transferred in and out of Sicilian Families during extended stays in his homeland. Though born in Siculiana, Gentile was involved with the Families in nearby Porto Empedocle and Realmonte while residing in Sicily and in his memoir he confirms his transfer to the Porto Empedocle Family for a period. He also had close ties to Ribera, noting that his brother-in-law was in Ribera during one of these Sicilian trips. Nicola Gentile's close friend Antonino Cucuzzella was also a Riberese figure who can be connected to a family of mafiosi affiliated with the DeCavalcante and Chicago Families.

Though Gentile's references to his friend Cucuzzella are brief, focusing only on an ill-fated trip to Quebec during World War I where Cucuzzella had relatives, genealogical records and later FBI investigation revealed the Cucuzzellas had ties to prominent Riberese mafia figures in New York and Chicago. The Cucuzzellas were extended relatives of the Lolordos, specifically Chicago Family boss Pasquale and his brother Joseph, the Queens DeCavalcante *capodecina* described earlier.

Antonino Cucuzzella lived in New York City and his son Calogero "Leo" Cucuzzella would settle in Philadelphia then Delaware where he was once arrested on gambling charges. The FBI's investigation into Joseph Lolordo revealed that Leo Cucuzzella maintained contact with his cousin in New York until the end of Leo's life. It's possible both Cucuzzellas were associated with the DeCavalcante Family, a group known for its widespread but tightknit membership that included members in Elizabeth, Trenton, multiple New York City boroughs, Marlboro, Connecticut, and even New Orleans. The presence of Leo Cucuzzella in Delaware could expand that range slightly. Trenton DeCavalcante member Girolamo Guarraggi also has relatives in Delaware as well as Canada like the Cucuzzellas.



Name:	LEO CUCUZELLA
Address:	19 South Union Street Wilmington, Delaware (February 26, 1944)
Race:	White
Sex:	Male
Place of Birth:	Italy
Occupation:	Merchant
Date of Birth:	May 25, 1903
Father;	ANTHONY Place of Birth - Italy
Mother's nee Name:	GILEBERTO, Place of Birth - Italy
Arrest Record:	Arrested February 26, 1944 for playing crap - dismissed

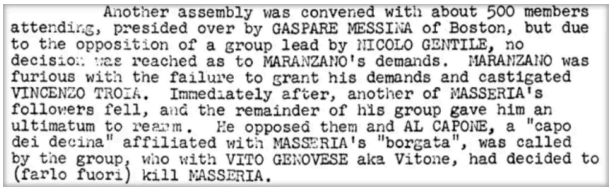
Lolordo cousin Leo Cucuzzella's father was Gentile's close friend.

Heritage and kinship often tied the DeCavalcantes together more than geographic proximity. Like Antonino Cucuzzella, Joseph Lolordo kept ties to their mutual relatives in the large Montreal Agrigentini community, an element in Canada that bleeds in with the Montreal Bonanno crew. These Canadian Bonanno figures came from Cattolica Eraclea and Siculiana, forming their own extensive *compaesani* clans of deep interrelation that produced Cosa Nostra members in multiple countries. A recent Italian investigation recorded the Sciacca Family boss stating that the Ribera Family currently has a gambling machine partnership in Canada with mafiosi from Cattolica Eraclea.

Nicola Gentile's connection to Giuseppe Caterinicchia does not just come peripherally from relationships to Caterinicchia's *compaesani* in other cities like Antonino Cucuzzella and his relatives the Lolordos — Gentile and Caterinicchia can be directly connected. Arrested in the late 1930s for his role in a narcotics trafficking network between New York and New Orleans, Gentile's address book was obtained by authorities and showed a "who's who" of the mafia's Agrigento network. Mafia-affiliated names and addresses across the United States filled the pages of Nicola Gentile's address book and there was even a lone listing in Birmingham: "Joe Catarinicchia [sic], R.F.D. Box 298, Birmingham, Ala."

Though Gentile does not mention traveling to Alabama in his memoir nor does he acknowledge any awareness of the Birmingham group, he was a member of the *Gran Consiglio*, a spiritual predecessor of the Commission that mediated national disputes for what he termed the *Societa Onorata*, what members now call Cosa Nostra. His duties often pertained to the national Agrigento network that he himself was instrumental in preserving and expanding. The *Gran Consiglio* naturally included representatives of these different networks, perhaps more appropriately called “sub-networks” given they all fed into the larger Cosa Nostra network. It is logical Nicola Gentile’s role familiarized him with Giuseppe Caterinicchia given the latter was a mafioso from Ribera.

Gentile was a mafia socialite, attending banquets around the country and showing intense comradery with his underworld peers regardless of location. Gaspare Messina even held a banquet in Nicola Gentile's honor during an early 1920s Boston visit, though pressing matters didn't allow Gentile to attend. Comically, the banquet took place anyway and Gentile was told by a friend how the Boston boss gave a toast in the absent Gentile's honor. Gentile and Messina were also involved in high-level machinations during the Castellammarese War close to a decade later, both men connected to different national factions despite their friendship, though the two of them served primarily as mediators rather than stoking the flames of war. Messina, as noted, was the interim *capo dei capi* while Gentile sat on a national peace committee alongside top *rappresentanti*.


Another assembly was convened with about 500 members attending, presided over by GASPARE MESSINA of Boston, but due to the opposition of a group lead by NICOLO GENTILE, no decision was reached as to MARANZANO's demands. MARANZANO was furious with the failure to grant his demands and castigated VINCENZO TROIA. Immediately after, another of MASSERIA's followers fell, and the remainder of his group gave him an ultimatum to rearm. He opposed them and AL CAPONE, a "capo dei decina" affiliated with MASSERIA's "borgata", was called by the group, who with VITO GENOVESE aka Vitone, had decided to (farlo fuori) kill MASSERIA.

Messina and Gentile were top national figures during the 1930-31 war.

Nicola Gentile states in his memoir that everything he did in life was connected to Cosa Nostra. The appearance of Caterinicchia's Birmingham mailing address in Gentile's address book is hardly mysterious in this regard given Giuseppe Caterinicchia's hometown and their mutual connection to Gentile's friend Gaspare Messina. While there is a degree of probability that Nicola Gentile personally met Giuseppe Caterinicchia during his extensive travels, especially when he served as Kansas City boss in the early 1920s, Gentile later described how he communicated via letter with prominent mafiosi he had yet to meet in person, with long-distance social networking directly informing his travels, residences, and even formal membership.

Gentile for example noted that he had been in communication with Pittsburgh boss Gregorio Conti via letter, Conti being a native of Comitini in Agrigento, and though the two men had yet to meet, Gregorio Conti knew of Gentile's reputation and invited him to Pittsburgh, an offer Gentile accepted. Nicola Gentile moved to Pittsburgh and subsequently transferred membership to the Western Pennsylvania organization under Conti and became one of its leading members.

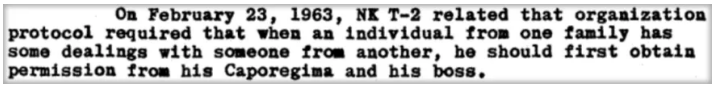
It is easy to be skeptical of Nicola Gentile's pride in his own underworld reputation, his memoir a constant stream of Gentile's accomplishments in mediation as well as mafia enforcement. He doesn't hesitate to describe the way other high-ranking members fawned over him. A significant amount of

the information he provided does correspond to available records, however, and though there are occasional discrepencies and mistakes, most of his recollections don't suggest deliberate dishonesty. One reputable source does support Gentile's description of himself as an esteemed mediator: Francesco "Frank" Coppola, a similar high-ranking journeyman within his own Partinico sub-network. Deported in the 1940s and often the target of narcotics investigations in Italy, an aging Coppola provided an interview with an Italian journalist in the 1970s in which he confirmed Nicola Gentile was a skilled mafia counselor. Coppola told the journalist how Gentile's advice should have been consulted more often by younger non-traditionalists like Charlie Luciano, Albert Anastasia, and Al Capone.

Coppola confirmed Gentile's reputation in a later interview.

Further objective evidence of Nicola Gentile's stature comes through his relationship with the powerful Charlie Luciano, the two men closely associating after both had returned to Italy by the mid-1940s. While residing in his native Sicily, Gentile told authorities that a name relevant to this article, Phil Amari, even traveled to Italy where he met with Luciano. Like Alabama, though, he never once acknowledges the DeCavalcante Family's existence despite his confirmed association with Riberese men like Antonino Cucuzzella and apparently Giuseppe Caterinicchia.

Though it's unknown if Nicola Gentile actually corresponded with Giuseppe Caterinicchia through the Birmingham address found in his possession, Gentile's postal communication with Pittsburgh boss Gregorio Conti, tenure as a ranking member in multiple American and Sicilian Families, and involvement with the *Gran Consiglio* show that he had a direct line to leaders in virtually every city. Family *rappresentanti* in the early American mafia were not as insulated as later bosses who now seek to protect themselves from increased law enforcement scrutiny and media attention but still, a member is not allowed to contact a boss blindly and though in these early years the boss was receptive to meeting a broader range of members, it still required that he receive approval from his superiors and that the *rappresentante* be notified in advance.

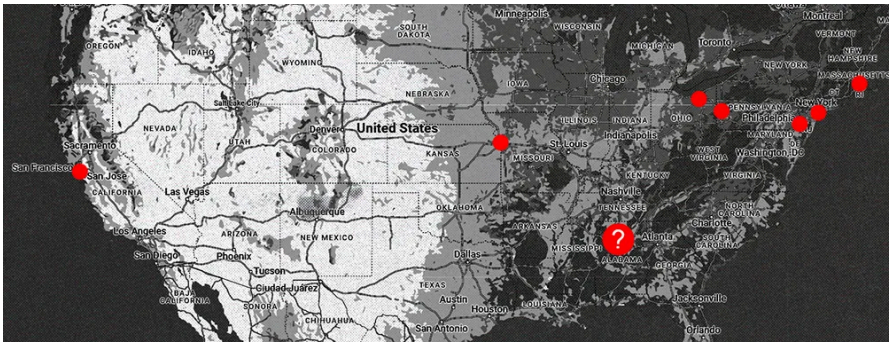

On February 23, 1963, NK T-2 related that organization protocol required that when an individual from one family has some dealings with someone from another, he should first obtain permission from his Caporegima and his boss.

Members were receptive to contact but protocol had to be followed.

Outsiders at the time were quite dense in perceiving the true nature of these relationships and mafiosi could operate within their own society with relative freedom so long as they followed rules and protocol. Protocol was not designed to limit them, but to maintain discipline within the international system of shadow governance. There are examples of rank-and-file members being allowed direct contact with another Family's *rappresentante* when traveling and moving to different cities, though Gentile was not one of these "ordinary" members and often held administrative positions in addition to his involvement with the *Gran Consiglio* so in this context the point is moot.

In 1923, when Gaspare Messina sent money to Giuseppe Caterinicchia, Nicola Gentile was himself the boss of Kansas City which placed him in relative proximity to Alabama. The Kansas City Family had its own ties to Alabama that will be explored later, but Caterinicchia serving as Gentile's single point of contact in Alabama lends itself to Caterinicchia holding significant rank, perhaps even representing the Alabama Family as boss. Stronger evidence that Caterinicchia could have been the Alabama boss comes via Boston leader Gaspare Messina's long-distance financial interest in Caterinicchia, a transaction of this nature indicating that Messina was contacting a man of near-equal rank in the Alabama Family. It's a well-known axiom in Cosa Nostra that water finds its own level and men of equal stature form bonds as a matter of protocol as much as they do through general comradery.

The mafia is comprised of its own classes and peer groups, with certain rules requiring that men of the same or similar rank represent their Families in formal matters between two groups. Protocol brought high-ranking members together in addition to other circumstantial connections. Although the evidence is limited, this is a logical interpretation of Messina and Gentile's contact with Giuseppe Caterinicchia. Messina was a former New York Bonanno member living in Boston while the nomadic Nicola Gentile was at various times an influential member of Families in New York (Gambino), Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, San Francisco, and Philadelphia, even serving as a *rappresentante* or *consigliere* for some of these groups. Gaspare Messina and Nicola Gentile's connection to Caterinicchia may have had a personal dimension that we're unaware of but within the mafia network it was likely political in nature and not local to Alabama.



Messina & Gentile's ties to Caterinicchia suggest he represented Alabama.

A superficial understanding of Cosa Nostra, especially in these early days, may lead to skepticism over Giuseppe Caterinicchia's position given his apparent commitment to the Russellville farming community, nearly two hours northwest from Birmingham on today's modern roads. Uninformed outsiders tend to think of Family *rappresentanti* as "crime bosses" who micro-managed illegal operations in smokey backrooms, but if Caterinicchia was indeed the boss of Birmingham he wouldn't be the only American boss to operate some distance from his organization.

In Philadelphia, back-to-back bosses Joe Bruno Dovi and Joe Ida lived in New Brunswick and utilized Camden-based underboss Marco Reginelli to manage daily operations in their core Philadelphia and South Jersey territory. Longtime member John Cappello Jr. told an informant he rarely saw Ida when the latter served as boss. Even more extreme is Joe Bonanno, who for 20 years between the 1940s and 1960s lived much of the year in Arizona where he established a West Coast faction within his New York Family. Like the Philadelphia bosses in North Jersey, Bonanno utilized his underboss and various acting bosses to oversee activities in New York.

S Right. He could have been if he wanted to but I don't think he wanted that title, because he was doing all right. Then JOE took it. First there was BRUNO from Newark, JOE BRUNO, and he died, right?

Bruno Dovi & Ida were Philadelphia bosses in "Newark" (New Brunswick).

The traditional term *rappresentante* for Family boss plays into these political arrangements. A *rappresentante* was primarily concerned with upper-level administration and national affairs. It was and to some degree still is a position elected by the membership to serve as a delegate as much as it is a final authority; Sicilian *pentito* Tommaso Buscetta stated that the *rappresentante* is a "servant" of the Family. Members from Western Sicily, especially those from the same region, understood this process and did not need the constant presence of a Family boss nearby in order to respect his position and adhere to the strict customs of mafia membership.

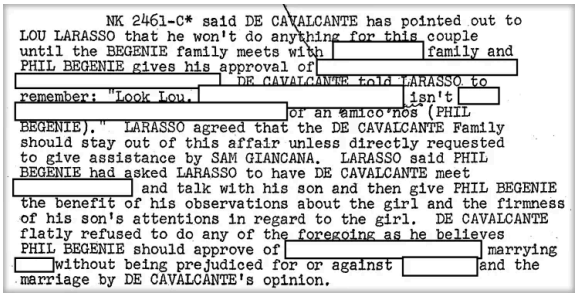
Americanization and the increasingly pan-Italian and street-based relationships that came to influence many US Cosa Nostra Families changed this dynamic, though remnants of the original process have remained into relative modernity.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia may not have operated remotely during the time he was a possible *rappresentante*, though. By 1920 he was living in Birmingham and while he may have maintained a farm in Russellville during this time, this places his residence within city limits by the time he was contacted by Gaspare Messina in 1923. The Birmingham organization is shrouded in mystery and even if Caterinicchia was a Family boss by the 1920s, there is no way to know when he was elected or who may have held this position previously when Caterinicchia resided full-time in Russellville. Giuseppe Caterinicchia could have been a tenured *rappresentante* by the 1920s or a newly-elected leader, taking over for an even more obscure name we may never learn. Caterinicchia's candidacy as boss is evident based on his correspondence with other national *rappresentanti*, his hometown of Ribera, and the extensive clan connections this mafia environment represented.

Caterinicchia's New Jersey Ties

Much as the surname of Giuseppe Caterinicchia's brother-in-law Pasquale Amari and his relation to the Giaccobe name bring to mind DeCavalcante Family figures, some of these connections substantiated, Caterinicchia's surname is as well present in New Jersey DeCavalcante circles. The similarly-named Salvatore Caterinicchio from Ribera was identified as a senior DeCavalcante member in the 1960s who regularly met with Family boss Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante and it was Caterinicchio's niece-via-marriage that wedded Riberese Chicago member Phil Bacino's son after the couple met at the wedding of Frank Majuri's daughter in New Jersey.

Arrangements for the Chicago-New Jersey marriage of Bacino's son were overseen by Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante himself, the significance of this union taking on a political dimension in mafia circles that was not lost on the Family *rappresentante* given Phil Bacino's membership in Chicago. DeCavalcante utilized one of his top members, the Riberese Louis LaRasso, to accompany the bride-to-be and her family to Chicago so that Phil Bacino could approve the marriage and the Chicago Family was included in the process. It was Bacino's Riberese heritage that helped facilitate his son's marriage to a young girl in DeCavalcante circles, but Bacino's membership in another Family still had to be acknowledged. Salvatore Caterinicchio felt the DeCavalcante Family should pay for the event in addition to arranging to it, though Sam said he would only do so if requested by Chicago *rappresentante* Sam Giancana.

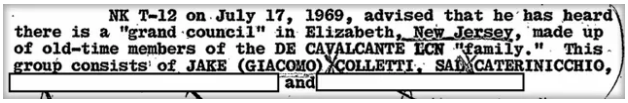


NK 2461-C* said DE CAVALCANTE has pointed out to LOU LARASSO that he won't do anything for this couple until the BEGENIE family meets with [redacted] family and PHIL BEGENIE gives his approval of [redacted] DE CAVALCANTE told LARASSO to remember: "Look Lou, [redacted] isn't [redacted] or an amico nos (PHIL BEGENIE)." LARASSO agreed that the DE CAVALCANTE Family should stay out of this affair unless directly requested to give assistance by SAM GIANCANA. LARASSO said PHIL BEGENIE had asked LARASSO to have DE CAVALCANTE meet [redacted] and talk with his son and then give PHIL BEGENIE the benefit of his observations about the girl and the firmness of his son's attentions in regard to the girl. DE CAVALCANTE flatly refused to do any of the foregoing as he believes PHIL BEGENIE should approve of [redacted] marrying [redacted] without being prejudiced for or against [redacted] and the marriage by DE CAVALCANTE's opinion.

The DeCavalcante Family supervised the wedding of Bacino's son.

Salvatore Caterinicchio is not known to have held an official title beyond Family soldier, but an FBI informant believed he was a member of the Family's ruling council, an oft-overlooked Family body outside of the top-down hierarchy that is also found in the Sicilian mafia and many early American Families. These formal councils had fixed seats that included administration members along with select captains and elder soldiers. Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante was recorded complaining about pushback he had received as boss from unspecified elders in the Family, a possible reference to this *consiglio*, and there are other vague references to the DeCavalcantes utilizing a council.

The term "soldier" betrays the true range of Cosa Nostra membership even at its so-called bottom rungs, with all members being *fratelli* worthy of respect and influence, at least in theory. This certainly appears true for Salvatore Caterinicchio, as indicated by FBI sources who noted his significant influence, these observations reinforced by his regular presence at Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante's office. If Salvatore Caterinicchio was in fact a member of a formal *consiglio* within the DeCavalcante Family, it indicates similarly-named men from Ribera in Alabama and New Jersey were both leading mafia members. Caterinicchio's presence on the 1947 Ribera Club orphanage committee with most of the Family's known leadership shows long-term stature in the organization.



NK T-12 on July 17, 1969, advised that he has heard there is a "grand council" in Elizabeth, New Jersey, made up of old-time members of the DE CAVALCANTE LCN "family." This group consists of JAKE (GIACOMO) COLLETTI, SAL CATERINICCHIO, [redacted] and [redacted]

Caterinicchio may have sat on a DeCavalcante Family *consiglio*.

That Giuseppe Caterinicchia and Salvatore Caterinicchio's names use different vowels is arbitrary. Genealogical research reveals that such minor phonetic differences are common even among relatives and often the result of language and literacy barriers on the part of both the immigrants themselves as well as government officials. Salvatore Caterinicchio, born 1904, did

descend from an ancestor named Giuseppe Caterinicchia in Ribera, much older than the Alabama one, but it potentially signals a common root.

The long and exotic Caterinicchia/Caterinicchio surname is difficult for me to keep straight even in writing this, it being a unique name that sets itself apart from the Rossis and Russos of the world. There are residents of New Jersey still today who use the Caterinicchia spelling and belong to the local Ribera Club. Evidence of Giuseppe Caterinicchia's direct ties to New Jersey come through his death: he died there in 1958, where he is buried in Mount Olivet Cemetary in Newark.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia of Alabama died in New Jersey.

Census reports place Giuseppe Caterinicchia in Alabama through 1940, when he was approaching 80-years-old, suggesting his time in New Jersey was limited and only moved there at the tail end of his life. Another record does identify a family member living in the Northeast earlier, however. His 1935 Declaration of Intention states that one of his children, daughter Carmela, was living in New York at the time. Carmela was married to the son of Paolo Amari, Pasquale's younger brother, much as her father was married to Pasquale and Paolo Amari's sister.

Carmela Caterinicchia Amari would die in Linden, New Jersey, while two of Giuseppe's other daughters ended up in Cranford and Elizabeth. Both Linden and Cranford sit just outside of Elizabeth and show that the family was heavily connected to the DeCavalcante Family's primary stomping ground. Though he is buried in Newark, it's presumable that Giuseppe Caterinicchia was in the Elizabeth area like his daughters in the final years of his life, one of his daughters having married an Amari, the name of the local Family boss at the time whose marital relationship to this clan is established through Phil Amari's paternal aunt and the marriage of her son to Pasquale Amari's daughter.

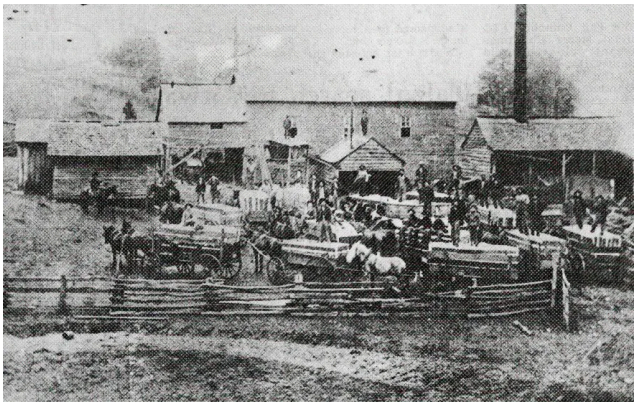
Paolo Amari's (pictured) son married Caterinicchia's daughter.

Alongside those already mentioned, there were other Ribera natives in Alabama, including Russellville, and this included Riberese names like Spinelli, Renda, Musso, Smeraglia, and Tortorici. Some of these families would intermarry with the Caterinicchia-Amari clan just as the Caterinicchias and Amaris intermarried with one another over multiple generations. There were also two families from Trapani that factor heavily into the bonds formed by the Caterinicchia-Amaris in Alabama.

Further Intermarriage

In addition to his daughter's marriage to the son of Pasquale's brother Paolo Amari, one of Giuseppe Caterinicchia's daughters married the son of another Riberese family in Alabama, the Spinellis. Giacomo "James" Spinelli and his family lived in Russellville before moving to the growing Elizabeth colony in New Jersey where another one of Spinelli's daughters married DeCavalcante member Giuseppe "Joe" Cocchiaro. Cocchiaro was alleged to be an uncle of DeCavalcante *capodecina* Frank Cocchiaro who would go on to recruit many of the Family's non-Sicilian members in Brooklyn during later decades.

Joe Cocchiaro initially arrived to Chicago from Ribera in the 1920s, the same period Phil Bacino and Pasquale Lolordo moved there. Cocchiaro would soon thereafter migrate to Elizabeth, marrying into the Spinellis after they left Russellville. Ties between Alabama and New Jersey were inevitable and the Cocchiaro-Spinelli marriage provides a substantial link between the Riberese colonies in Chicago, Elizabeth, and Russellville. A Gioacchino Spinelli was even among the founding members of the New Jersey Ribera Club in 1923 alongside Phil Amari and the Merlos, the latter being the first known Riberesi to settle in Elizabeth.

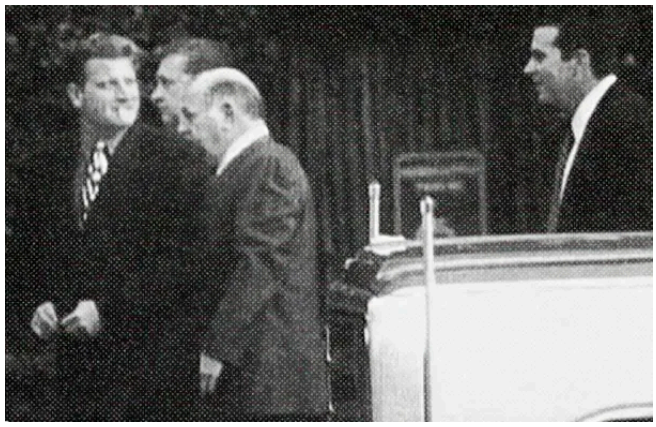


Russellville attracted Riberesi with ties to Elizabeth, NJ.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia's son Santo married a Smeraglia in Birmingham, her family from Ribera like the others. The Smeraglia name appears in Elizabeth and Santo's son Joseph, named for his grandfather Giuseppe, eventually lived in New Jersey's Bergen County. The Smeraglia name has been actively involved with the Ribera Club in Elizabeth for generations and surfaces in various family trees relevant to the DeCavalcante Family but has not produced any known members.

A name that shows up often in Riberese marital circles in Alabama is Musso. Though a specific relationship to the Caterinicchia-Amaris can't be substantiated, a Giuseppe Tortorici, born 1880, was married to a Musso and arrived to a cousin in Elizabeth in 1910 but by 1918 he was living in the East Lake neighborhood of Birmingham. This is a reversal of the Spinellis, who moved to Elizabeth from Alabama, but the Riberese colony in the Peterstown section of Elizabeth was at that time still in its early stages and relatively few Riberesi were there at the time. Alabama was perhaps an equally viable location in this evolving network and the Musso relation likely brought Tortorici there, these two Riberese surnames showing evidence of interrelation going back to Sicily.

Another name that surfaces in connection with the Caterinicchia-Amari clan is Renda, Pasquale Amari's daughter Frances marrying Michael Renda in Russellville. Renda is a common name in Agrigento and yet again it's a name that shows up in DeCavalcante circles. One of the mysterious Ribera Club members who sat on the orphanage committee in 1947 alongside the DeCavalcante hierarchy was Domenico Renda. Frank Renda is also an alleged member of today's DeCavalcante Family, Frank being the nephew of current Family leader Charles Majuri, the son of former underboss Frank. Charles Majuri is the product of parents with heritage in Corleone and Ribera, the latter coming via his mother. Majuri's uncle Joseph Caruano was himself a high-ranking Riberese DeCavalcante member.

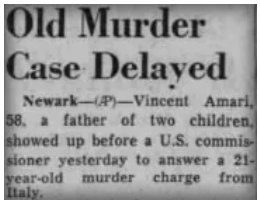


NJ members Joe Merlo Jr., Charles Majuri, Joe Caruano, & Frank Renda.

Charles Majuri was identified as the Family's acting boss in 2014-2015 and a leading candidate to assume the now-deceased John Riggi's official title. Both sides of Majuri's family have longstanding ties to Cosa Nostra and he's a second cousin of current Genovese boss Liborio "Barney" Bellomo, himself a multi-generation New York member with roots in Corleone. Frank Renda is the son of Charles Majuri's sister. That the Renda surname surfaces in the Russellville colony as a son-in-law of Pasquale Amari then again in New Jersey alongside DeCavalcante leaders like Phil Amari on the 1940s orphanage committee and now today within the dominant Majuri clan suggests Renda was once a name of significance in the Ribera network.

Caterinicchia-Amari clan marriages in Russellville and Birmingham extended outside of Ribera to families from Trapani province, too. Pasquale Amari's daughter Rose married Gioacchino "Jake" Sacco, this name bringing to mind Sacco's Meat Market in Elizabeth, a hangout of the DeCavalcante Family and the basis for Satriale's on the Sopranos. This is pure coincidence, though, as the Elizabeth Saccos are Calabrian and the Alabama ones were Sicilian like their in-laws. Jake Sacco was from Castelvetrano in Trapani.

The Mangiaracinas, or "Mangina" as it was later shortened, descended from Castelvetrano like the Sacco family and Mary Amari, another one of Pasquale's daughters, married Vincenzo Mangiaracina. Vincenzo was the son of DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari's aunt Giuseppa Amari and her husband Giuseppe Mangiaracina, referenced in an earlier section. Pasquale Amari's other son-in-law Jake Sacco witnessed the marriage between Vincenzo Mangiaracina and this Amari daughter, the half-Riberese Vincenzo being named for his mother's father Vincenzo Amari, the grandfather he shared with cousin Phil Amari. Phil's brother Vincenzo, the one who committed a 1924 murder in Sicily before settling in America, was also named for this common grandfather.



Old Murder Case Delayed

Newark—(AP)—Vincent Amari, 58, a father of two children, showed up before a U.S. commissioner yesterday to answer a 21-year-old murder charge from Italy.

Vincenzo Amari & Mangiaracina were named for their grandfather.

Pasquale Amari's daughter Mary was not the only person from this clan to marry into the Mangiaracinas, as Giuseppe Caterinicchia's daughter Francesca married Baldassare "Benny Mangina" Mangiaracina. Baldassare, born 1884 in Castelvetrano, was the younger brother of Giuseppe Mangiaracina, making him the brother-in-law of Phil Amari's paternal aunt as well as the son-in-law of Giuseppe Caterinicchia. It was Baldassare Mangiaracina and his wife who later joined the two other Caterinicchia sisters in the Elizabeth area, paving the way for Giuseppe Caterinicchia's eventual death and burial there. The marital relation between Baldassare Mangiaracina and Phil Amari would suggest the men were acquainted after Baldassare moved to New Jersey.

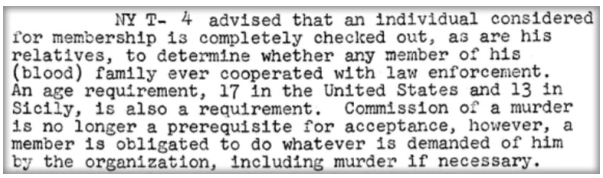
Extensive intermarriage of this nature between different *compaesani* groups in established mafia circles can suggest Cosa Nostra membership among not only the older generations of a clan but also sons and in-laws. Bill Bonanno's belief that the Alabama Family had only senior citizens by the 1930s calls this into doubt, though we also have room to doubt Bonanno's information given Caterinicchia and Amari were both younger than 80-years-old in the mid-1930s, the age Bill gave for the youngest Alabama member at the time.

Bill Bonanno's belief that the last remaining Alabama member died in 1938 also rests on shaky ground. Pasquale Amari lived until 1944 in Birmingham and though Amari's formal membership is more speculative, Giuseppe Caterinicchia's involvement with Cosa Nostra is almost certain and he lasted until 1958, living in Alabama and then New Jersey into his late-nineties around twenty years after Bonanno claimed the final member died. The inclusion of multiple men from Castelvetrano in the Caterinicchia-Amari clan further widens the Birmingham Family's potential recruitment pool.

Castelvetrano could have provided mafia recruits in Alabama.

To Bill's credit, the Family's choice to disband and their total obscurity would indicate they at least slowed down recruitment practices if not ceased inductions entirely among younger generations, though the presence of these younger Riberese and Castelvetranese men in Russellville and Birmingham who intermarried with the Caterinicchia-Amaris challenges Bonanno's statement that the only prospect for recruitment in the 1930s was 74-years-old. Members in that era were often made in their 20s and even younger, kinship being one of the strongest factors contributing to induction, so even if the Family deliberately closed its books in the 1920s and 1930s it wasn't because they lacked younger men with the right pedigree.

The ages of Castelvetrano-born Giuseppe Mangiaracina and his brother Baldassare rest in more neutral territory between Bill Bonanno's assertion and my own research. Giuseppe Mangiaracina, born in 1873, was in his 60s by the mid-1930s when the Family allegedly broke apart and though his brother was over a decade younger he too was well past prime age for induction. The Mangiaracina brothers would have been viable recruits for decades by the time the Family allegedly disbanded and the Alabama Family had to have stopped inducting members a significant time before the 1930s if indeed the youngest mafia figures by then were an 80-year-old member and a 74-year-old prospect. If these older Castelvetranese men or their younger relatives who repeatedly intermarried with the Caterinicchia-Amari clan weren't candidates for membership, it's difficult to imagine who was.



NY T- 4 advised that an individual considered for membership is completely checked out, as are his relatives, to determine whether any member of his (blood) family ever cooperated with law enforcement. An age requirement, 17 in the United States and 13 in Sicily, is also a requirement. Commission of a murder is no longer a prerequisite for acceptance, however, a member is obligated to do whatever is demanded of him by the organization, including murder if necessary.

A member informant claimed members were once made very young.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia's possible role as a leader of the Birmingham Family and his clan connections to mafia members in New York, New Jersey, and

Chicago make these overlapping and intersecting marriages from mafia strongholds in Agrigento and Trapani the most intriguing I've found in the state of Alabama. The Castelvetranese Giuseppe Mangiaracina lived for a time in Russellville where he too maintained a farm, but like others from this clan he eventually moved closer to Birmingham, Mangiaracina living first in Bessemer on the outskirts of the city by 1920 before residing in Birmingham proper where he died in 1959. Pasquale Amari similarly remained in Birmingham until the end of his life in 1944, fifteen years previous.

Giuseppe's brother Baldassare "Benny" Mangiaracina was using a mailing address in Birmingham by World War I just as his father-in-law Caterinicchia did five years later when he received money from Gaspare Messina. As mentioned, Baldassare ended up in the Elizabeth area of New Jersey, though, dying in 1955 where he was buried in Newark's Mount Olivet Cemetary like father-in-law Caterinicchia. The Newark Family, distinct from the DeCavalcantes in Elizabeth, is known to have had a large faction from villages near Castelvetrano, particularly Vita and Gibellina, the former producing Newark underboss Saverio "Sam" Monaco who was murdered in 1931 following the Castellammarese War. Monaco's business partner in Newark was a "C. Mangiaracina" and Newark underworld figure Dominick Pacelli, murdered in 1930, associated with a different Benny Mangiaracina. These Mangiaracinas were from Trapani but likely came from Camporeale and not Castelvetrano.

The Mangiaracinas of Alabama can't be linked to mafia activity beyond their relation to the Caterinicchia-Amaris, but there were Mangiaracinas from Castelvetrano with confirmed mafia membership in Kansas City who had ties to Alabama. Of note is that Pasquale Amari's 1912 voyage to America included a man from Castelvetrano named Savona who was heading to Kansas City. Some confirmed Kansas City mafiosi with heritage in Castelvetrano and their connections to Alabama will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

A Kansas City man from Castelvetrano arrived alongside Amari.

Giuseppe Mangiaracina was the patriarch among these Castelvetranese Alabama residents and the many marriages between his family and the Caterinicchia-Amari clan are consistent with the mafia practice of forming kinship ties to other members. Mangiaracina and Giuseppe Caterinicchia's respective marriages to Amari women show that this played out among the older generations of these Alabama settlers in addition to the patterns observed among their children. While intermarriage certainly does not

confirm mafia association it is still a strong indicator, clannish mafiosi like the Riberesi being among the most dedicated practitioners of “mafia marriage”.

Drawing back to Boston boss Gaspare Messina's contact with Giuseppe Caterinicchia in 1923, it should be noted that Messina's hometown of Salemi is only 15 miles from the Mangiaracinas' home village of Castelvetrano. Much as regional villages in Western Agrigento are deeply interconnected, especially as they relate to mafia politics, the same is true for the area of Trapani where Castelvetrano and Salemi sit. Gaspare Messina presided over a mafia organization in Boston that included influential mafiosi from Salemi but the Boston area also had immigrants from a wide number of towns in this Sicilian region, including Castelvetrano.

Though further away from Castelvetrano than Salemi, mafiosi from Marsala like the violent Genna brothers banded together in Chicago with members from Castelvetrano in the 1920s to fight underworld rivals, allegedly recruiting some of these men from Sicily. An earlier Chicago mafioso named Pietro Montalbano was also from Castelvetrano and his mother was a Mangiaracina like those found in Alabama. The murderous Montalbano was described by the brother of one of his alleged victims as a “mafia member”, indicating Castelvetranesi gained formal membership in Chicago early in its history. Montalbano was contemporary in age to the Mangiaracinas found in Alabama and his maternal heritage could provide a link.

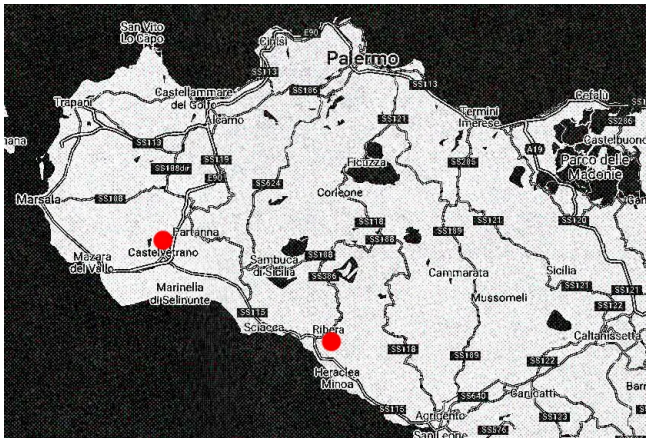
Chicago mafia killer Montalbano’s mother was a Mangiaracina.

The extensive international network maintained by mafiosi from Ribera that spans time and place adds probability that Cosa Nostra figures from Castelvetrano were acquainted if not close nationally within their own respective *compaesani* sub-network. Like the recurring surnames and connections in Agrigento circles, the same is clearly true for Trapani. In addition to an unknown financial matter bringing them together, Gaspare Messina and Giuseppe Caterinicchia may have had mutual friends via the inland Trapanese network in Alabama. As a Family boss and senior

representative in this Trapani network, the Salemi native Gaspare Messina could have been acquinted with the Mangiaracinas and therefore Giuseppe Caterinicchia in addition to other factors that caused their circles to overlap.

The mafia has a long history in Castelvetrano and early *pentito* Dr. Melchiorre Allegra, an ostensibly legitimate hospital director, was originally from Castelvetrano though he was inducted into a Palermo Family while serving in the military during World War I. Allegra identified a Cosa Nostra Family in his hometown of Castelvetrano during this period though he said this organization chose to disband in the 1930s due to pressure from the Fascist government, paralleling Birmingham in America. Castelvetrano surfacing in connection with an Alabama mafia clan at a time when both transatlantic Families made an identical decision to disband is no doubt coincidental though it shows adherence to the same international protocol and perhaps a similar willingness to break their organizations when circumstances make mafia activity undesirable.

The presence of Castelvetrano alongside Ribera in rural Russellville and the Birmingham area is not surprising unto itself despite being in different provinces. Castelvetrano is a 37 mile trip along the coast and slightly inland from Ribera and the two locations surface together outside of Alabama. The early Chicago Family included members from Castelvetrano, Ribera, and surrounding villages in both provinces, with later members continuing to draw heritage from these locations, most notably Chicago boss Tony Accardo, the son of Castelvetranese immigrants, and his successor Sam Giancana whose parents were from Castelvetrano and Partanna. Phil Bacino from Ribera was a member under Accardo and Giancana long after their respective *compaesani* groups faded in the city and the later Northside captain Vince Solano was also Riberese. The Kansas City and Pueblo Families show similar relationships between members from the same Trapani-Agrigento border area, proof that these areas produced birds of the same feather in different locale.



Castelvetrano (L) and Ribera (R) share a degree of regional affinity.

Dr. Melchiorre Allegra confirmed a Castelvetrano Family existed into the 1930s and disbanded, as Birmingham did, but in Sicily the dissolution of a Family doesn't have to be permanent like it tends to be in the United States. In the mafia's homeland they don't simply have Western Sicilian colonies that facilitate the creation and maintenance of Families, they have the entirety of Western Sicily itself at their disposal. Small American colonies like Birmingham and Tampa that had high percentages of Sicilians in their communities are dwarfed by the near-100% Sicilian heritage of Sicily itself, a silly observation but one that must be stated. A Family in Sicily can disband and easily reform given the immense mafia infrastructure surrounding it and sources like Tommaso Buscetta referred to this process even in Palermo *citta*.

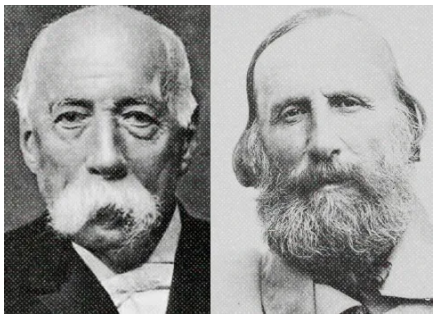
The Castelvetrano Family did reform at some point, likely after World War II and the fall of Mussolini when Cosa Nostra regained dominance over its time-honored territory. Castelvetrano unsurprisingly continues to maintain relationships to Ribera in their native region, just as these villages formed relationships in Alabama over 100 years ago. Infamous Castelvetrano mafia leader Matteo Messina Denaro, the son of a previous boss, was documented by Italian authorities in modern years mediating a business dispute in Ribera in tandem with Corleone leader and de facto *capo dei capi* Bernardo Provenzano, now deceased. The fugitive Matteo Messina Denaro was believed to have spent time hiding out in Agrigento, with surveillance footage released by Italian law enforcement showing a man in an SUV believed to be Messina Denaro passing through the province.

Alleged footage of fugitive Messino Denaro in Agrigento, 2009.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia and Pasquale Amari's hometown of Ribera shows up consistently in high-level Sicilian mafia politics, being one of the main fixtures in the province's extensive system of small, rural Families. Even in the clannish Sicilian mafia the province of Agrigento has a reputation for being an extraordinarily secretive sub-network that mingles primarily with mafiosi in its own region, the spirit of *campanilismo* being alive and well in this part of Sicily. This internal comradery apparently extends to the southern end of Trapani as well. Despite its relatively small size and insular nature, Ribera's prominence also factors into Sicilian history.

Understanding Ribera: Crispi's Empire & Beyond

Francesco Crispi was born in Ribera in 1818 and served as Italian Prime Minister first between 1887 and 1891 and then again between 1893 and 1896, the period leading up to Giuseppe Caterinicchia's late 1890s arrival to the United States. Crispi was described as a hard-headed leader who cemented his place in Italian history first as a key ally of Giuseppe Garibaldi during the 1860 Unification of Italy. Crispi has never been linked to Cosa Nostra but the 1860 revolution included collaboration with known mafiosi from Palermo and before discussing Agrigento further it's worth expanding on some of these connections.



The Riberese Crispi (L) was a key Sicilian ally of Garibaldi (R).

Among the names involved in Garibaldi's revolution, Antonino Giammona of Palermo's Uditore and Passo di Rigano districts was a key deputy in the

takeover and provides a definitive link between Garbibaldi's forces and the mafia. A close confidant of Nicolo Turrisi Colonna, a prominent Palermo politician, Giammona was identified in the later 19th century as the Cosa Nostra boss of Uditore and his son Giuseppe Giammona would be identified as the boss of neighboring Passo di Rigano as early as 1898 in the Sangiorgi Report, which collected extensive information on the contemporary Palermo mafia at the turn of the century.

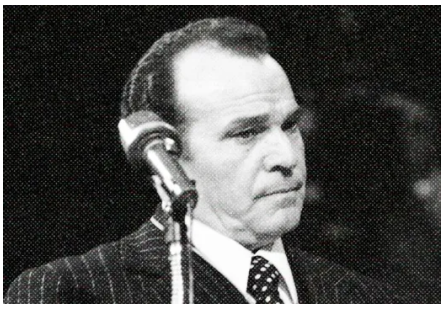
A descendant of the Giammonas married New York boss Carlo Gambino's sister in Palermo and her son Eustachio "Leo" Giammona eventually became a Lucchese member after arriving in America, marrying Francesco Castellana's daughter and later being murdered in 1988. Castellana was an early *capodecina* in the Gambino Family and a cousin of Giuseppe Castellano, a fellow *capodecina* and father of future boss Paul Castellano, who was in turn related to his predecessor Carlo Gambino through both blood and marriage. A later Gambino captain, Pasquale "Patsy" Conte, was the son of Family underboss Antonino Conte and came from Palermo, telling the FBI they knew the Gambinos and Castellanos in Sicily. Interestingly, Patsy Conte and his mother arrived to the United States with the mother of DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari in 1936, the Contes being listed next to Amari's Ribera-born mother on the manifest.

Carlo Gambino's first *consigliere* Joseph Riccobono's ancestors were also involved in the 1860 revolution, as were those of Frank Scalise, murdered in 1957 by boss Albert Anastasia. The Riccobono and Scalise families were already related dating back to the time of the Palermo revolution and Scalise's killer Anastasia was assassinated by a faction led by Riccobono, which directly led to Carlo Gambino becoming Family boss. That ancestral connections trace these high-ranking Palermo-born Gambino members back to the 1860 revolution around 100 years before they took over a New York Family is incredible but the relations are confirmed by mafia historians. Other families linked to Cosa Nostra through multiple generations are believed to have participated in the unification efforts as well, the revolution showing the deep connections between Sicily's dual governments, Cosa Nostra and the State.

Joe Riccobono's ancestors had ties to the 1860 revolution.

Countless mayors in Western Sicily have been identified as Cosa Nostra members and even bosses. Some have even gained significant national stature in Italy as a whole, among them cabinet minister Bernardo Mattarella from Castellammare del Golfo, identified as a Cosa Nostra member by mafia *pentito* Francesco DiCarlo, and European Parliament member Salvo Lima of Palermo, identified by a San Jose FBI informant as a Cosa Nostra member during a 1962 visit Lima made to the United States. Both Mattarella and Lima were members of the Christian Democrat Party and Lima was murdered in 1992 by his mafia affiliates.

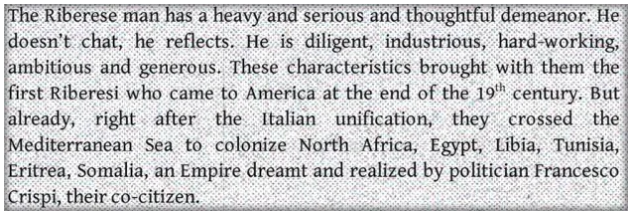
Agrigento province, from which the Riberese Prime Minister Francesco Crispi descends, has a long history of Cosa Nostra infilitrating municipal politics. Mayors and municipal figures have been identified as Cosa Nostra members in towns like Naro and Siculiana, among others, with Siculiana also producing Alfonso Gagliano, who moved to Canada and became a Member of Parliament and Minister of Labour. Gagliano was also a made member of the Bonanno Family's Montreal faction, being identified by former Bonanno captain and government witness Frank Lino who was introduced to Gagliano as an *amico nostra* during a visit on behalf of the Family's New York leadership. The DeCavalcante Family's Riberesi were connected to the Montreal Bonanno group as well through Pietro Sciara of Siculiana.



Sciara from Siculiana shows a marital link to the Riberese DeCavalcantes.

Siculianese and Riberese mafiosi are of course close, as evidenced by Nicola Gentile and his Lolordo-related friend Antonino Cucuzzella's travel to Quebec. In turn, the Bonanno Montreal *decina* members generations later were reportedly close to the DeCavalcante Family, these Bonannos members coming from Siculiana like Gagliano and others like the Rizzuto-Renda clan coming from Cattolica Eraclea. Tying these relationships through intermarriage was DeCavalcante member Girolamo Guarraggi from Ribera, whose Montreal-based brother married the daughter of Siculiana-born Montreal Bonanno member Pietro Sciara, murdered in 1976. Another brother of Guarraggi was arrested at a gambling raid in Ontario during the early 1990s with Bonanno-linked figures from Agrigento.

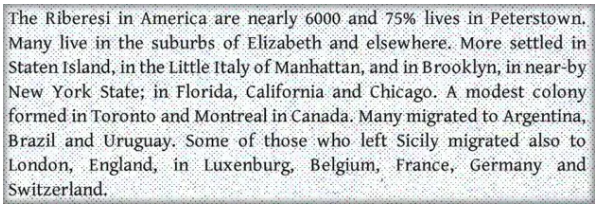
Francesco Crispi's ties to the mafia in his native Agrigento, if any, are not known, though his involvement in the 1860 revolution alongside Cosa Nostra figures and his roots in the mafia stronghold of Ribera are curious. After the Unification of Italy he encouraged his Riberese *compaesani* to proliferate internationally. Published in 2022, the book *The Prevident Progeny: Italians in America* states that these efforts by Crispi extended to locations throughout the world, Crispi intending to create a global empire comprised of his Ribera townsmen, an example of intense *campanilismo* from a major national politician.


The Riberese man has a heavy and serious and thoughtful demeanor. He doesn't chat, he reflects. He is diligent, industrious, hard-working, ambitious and generous. These characteristics brought with them the first Riberesi who came to America at the end of the 19th century. But already, right after the Italian unification, they crossed the Mediterranean Sea to colonize North Africa, Egypt, Libia, Tunisia, Eritrea, Somalia, an Empire dreamt and realized by politician Francesco Crispi, their co-citizen.

Crispi is said to have envisioned a global empire of Riberesi.

Crispi's efforts are said to have encouraged much of the Riberese immigration we see to the United States during this early era and just as Crispi wanted to create an empire internationally, the Riberesi maintained a humble empire of sorts within the United States that connected disparate locations, evidenced by the mafiosi discussed here. These Cosa Nostra members, along with ordinary civilians from Ribera, eventually "decided" on Elizabeth, New Jersey, as the headquarters of their immigrant network.

The Prevident Progeny's discussion of Riberese immigration patterns states that among the 6000 Ribera natives living in the United States by the mid-1970s, 75% lived in the Peterstown neighborhood of Elizabeth and surrounding areas, with other colonies in various New York City boroughs, Florida, California, and Chicago, as well as Toronto and Montreal in Canada. DeCavalcante member Girolamo Guarraggi is evidence of this, as he lived in Elizabeth prior to Trenton and his aforementioned brothers settled in Montreal and Ontario. Guarraggi himself lived in Canada prior to the United States.


The Riberesi in America are nearly 6000 and 75% lives in Peterstown. Many live in the suburbs of Elizabeth and elsewhere. More settled in Staten Island, in the Little Italy of Manhattan, and in Brooklyn, in near-by New York State; in Florida, California and Chicago. A modest colony formed in Toronto and Montreal in Canada. Many migrated to Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Some of those who left Sicily migrated also to London, England, in Luxenburg, Belgium, France, Germany and Switzerland.

Crispi's goals were arguably realized in North America.

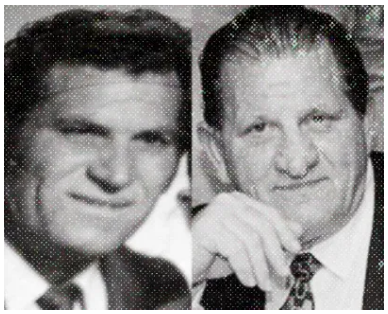
Alabama is notably absent from this list of Riberese colonies but despite the apparent prominence of the Caterinicchia-Amari clan during the early 20th century, there is nothing to suggest Alabama was a primary destination for Riberesi. Caterinicchia relocating to New Jersey where he joined three daughters who had settled in the Elizabeth area is evidence enough that New Jersey was a more attractive location for younger generations of *compaesani* than Birmingham. Available information on Pasquale Amari's descendants indicates those that remained in Alabama assimilated and did not maintain the extensive ties we see among Riberese clans elsewhere, while those in other American colonies maintained and for that matter still maintain contact with *paesani* nationally and internationally.

Riberesi are concentrated in Peterstown (far right) and SW suburbs.

Specifics about the DeCavalcante Family's origins remain unknown and contested, but Elizabeth has been regarded as DeCavalcante Family headquarters for approximately 100 years. It was not the initial Riberese colony in the area, though. Immigrants from Ribera were settling in Manhattan as early as 1892, some of these families sharing surnames with future members of the Family's Manhattan-Queens *decina*, this group being referred to in one FBI report as the "old faction" of the Family. This is the group Phil Bacino's possible relatives the Giacobbes belonged to. Future boss Phil Amari himself lived in Manhattan prior to Elizabeth, with other prominent figures like Bacino, the Lolordos, and even Alabama's Pasquale Amari passing through New York City before settling in their final destinations elsewhere.

The first known Riberese family to actually settle in Elizabeth were the Merlos, relatives of the Riggis and LaRassos going back to Sicily, all of which produced direct descendants who became significant DeCavalcante leaders. Younger generations of Merlos, Riggis, and LaRassos would again intermarry in New Jersey. The Merlo family was involved in a grocery store and also established a dairy farm in the then-rural Peterstown neighborhood after

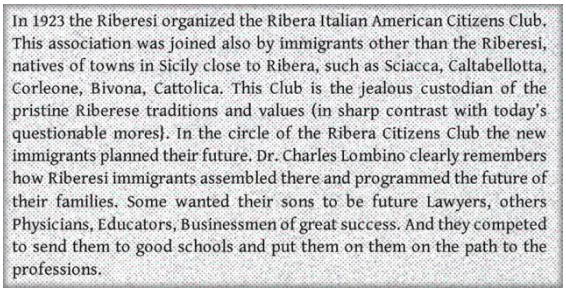
patriarch Michele Merlo arrived to Manhattan in 1905, with relatives and other Riberesi gradually following him to the area, their involvement in the dairy industry mirroring Giuseppe Caterinicchia's farming activity in Russellville during the same years. Ribera is an agricultural base in that region of Sicily and the farms they established in America were a natural continuation of what these men knew in their homeland.



Joe Merlo Sr. (L) & Jr.'s (R) ancestors settled in Elizabeth from Ribera.

One of the first families to join the Merlos in Elizabeth were brothers Giovanni and Giuseppe Riggi, Giovanni being the respective father and grandfather of DeCavalcante members Emanuele "Manny" Riggi and his son John, who would later become Family boss. Manny Riggi was instrumental in the formation of the Family's Local 394 Hod Carriers Union and John Riggi inducted three of his own sons into Cosa Nostra. The first generation of Riggis to come to New Jersey from Ribera, particularly John's grandfather Giovanni, likely provided a foundation for the family's involvement in the local mafia organization.

The Merlo clan eventually produced DeCavalcante members Joe "Milk" Merlo Sr. and two sons, Michael and Joe Jr., both of which married female relatives of ranking DeCavalcante members. The initial Merlo settlers in Elizabeth were named Michele and Giuseppe like their direct ancestors, evidence of Sicilian naming traditions. It was not until the 1910s and 1920s that the Elizabeth colony became the primary destination for Ribera immigrants, some of them moving from other residences in the United States like the Spinellis from Alabama and others from Chicago, but it was the Merlos who provided the initial foundation for Riberesi in Elizabeth.

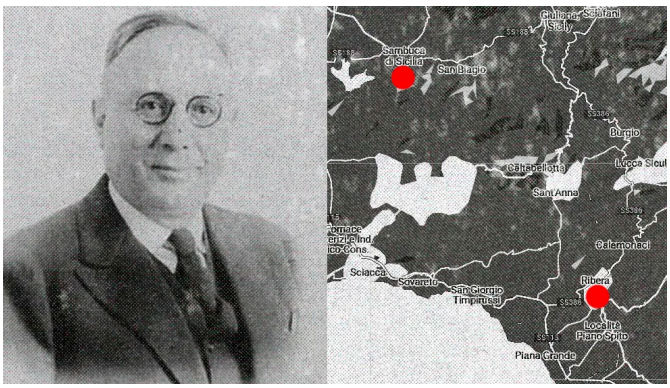


In 1923 the Riberesi organized the Ribera Italian American Citizens Club. This association was joined also by immigrants other than the Riberesi, natives of towns in Sicily close to Ribera, such as Sciacca, Caltabellotta, Corleone, Bivona, Cattolica. This Club is the jealous custodian of the pristine Riberese traditions and values (in sharp contrast with today's questionable mores). In the circle of the Ribera Citizens Club the new immigrants planned their future. Dr. Charles Lombino clearly remembers how Riberesi immigrants assembled there and programmed the future of their families. Some wanted their sons to be future Lawyers, others Physicians, Educators, Businessmen of great success. And they competed to send them to good schools and put them on them on the path to the professions.

The Ribera Club included other *compaesani* groups in addition to Ribera.

The Prevident Progeny describes how many of these Riberesi immigrants worked as laborers and were involved in major construction projects in Elizabeth. While there are many multi-generation Cosa Nostra lineages in the area, some of them going back to Sicily, the book also notes that Riberese immigrants wanted respectable professions for their children. This was true even among mafia members, with two of member Salvatore Caterinicchio's sons becoming doctors, Joe Lolordo of New York's son becoming a dentist, and the son of Lolordo's murdered brother Pasquale becoming a lawyer. None of these sons followed their fathers into Cosa Nostra, but mafia membership is not inconsistent in the DeCavalcante Family with an outwardly respectable lifestyle as evidenced by former Board of Education Vice President and funeral parlor owner Carl Corsentino becoming a second-generation member.

A relationship to the New Jersey Merlos from Ribera can't be substantiated, but another Michele Merlo from nearby Sambuca di Sicilia was the boss of the Chicago Family beginning in the early 1920s and there is evidence he was at least part of the same Agrigento network that produced the DeCavalcante Family. Naturally this Merlo was a close friend of Nicola Gentile. Chicago's Michele Merlo died of natural causes in 1924, but his rise as boss may have attracted Riberese men to Chicago like Phil Bacino and the Lolordos from New York, as well as future St. Louis boss Pasquale Miceli from Burgio who had previously been living in a small Southern Illinois colony. There is reason to believe the Riberese Michele Merlo of Elizabeth or perhaps his brother Giuseppe had significant stature in the future DeCavalcante Family before or during the time Michele Merlo was boss of Chicago, too.

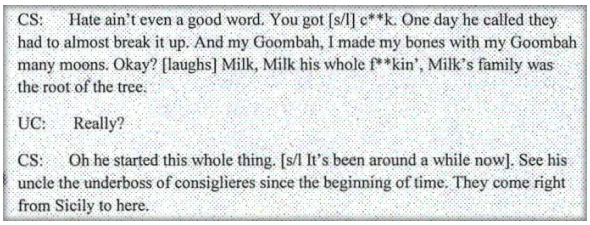


Chicago boss Michele Merlo was from Sambuca, northwest of Ribera.

Though he passed away in 2021, a 2014 undercover investigation into the DeCavalcantes revealed that Joe Merlo Jr. used the "Milk" nickname like his father and served as the Family's so-called "street boss" from his residence in Monmouth County. Merlo Jr.'s first wife was the daughter of a Family *capodecina*, Giuseppe Schifilliti, sentenced to life in prison for his involvement

in a 1991 murder conspiracy though he has since been released following an appeal. The man Schifilliti was convicted of conspiring against was Louis LaRasso, the former underboss who once helped arrange the New Jersey-Chicago marriage of Phil Bacino's son. LaRasso himself was an in-law of the Merlos like one of the men involved in his murder.

Family *capodecina* Charles Stango was recorded by an undercover law enforcement agent referring to Joe "Milk" Merlo Jr.'s family as the "root of the tree," stating that Merlo Jr. operates like it's "1910" and that his ancestors "started this whole thing," coming "from Sicily to here". Stango's oral history could indicate one or more of these early Ribera-born Merlos in then-developing Peterstown provided foundational members of the DeCavalcante Family, their influence obviously carrying through multiple generations of known members up to present day.



CS: Hate ain't even a good word. You got [s/l] c**k. One day he called they had to almost break it up. And my Goombah, I made my bones with my Goombah many moons. Okay? [laughs] Milk, Milk his whole f**kin', Milk's family was the root of the tree.

UC: Really?

CS: Oh he started this whole thing. [s/l It's been around a while now]. See his uncle the underboss of consiglieres since the beginning of time. They come right from Sicily to here.

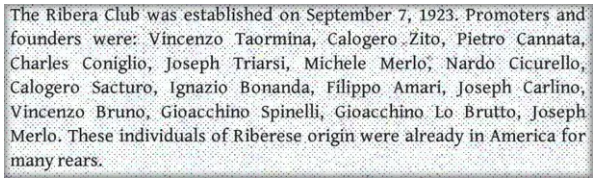
Charles Stango said the DeCavalcante Merlos were "the root of the tree."

Stango, a street hoodlum who climbed the ranks through his violent reputation, lacks polish and is not an eloquent speaker (e.g. he says "Milk's unspecified uncle was "underboss of consiglieres since the beginning of time"). His offhand remarks to an undercover agent may not reflect a perfect grasp of Family history, but his comments are supported by the Merlos' presence in Elizabeth by the first decade of the 20th century before other Riberesi were in the area. Other patterns observed in Ribera Club history may also support his statements.

Family bosses Nick Delmore and his so-called "nephew" Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante, non-Riberesi but Sicilians nonetheless, served as senior officers in the Ribera Club simultaneously with their time as Family *rappresentante*. Phil Amari, who predated both Delmore and Rizzo DeCavalcante as boss, also held a key position in the Ribera Club while holding the top rank in the mafia organization that parallels the club. Bosses prior to Amari have never been confirmed beyond vague anecdotes that may have little basis given the mysterious and clannish nature of the group, though we can use these same patterns and Stango's information to speculate.

Along with the above examples, the Ribera Club's orphanage committee included a "who's who" of the Family hierarchy through different generations

of the organization's leadership, suggesting these patterns in the Ribera Club played out earlier. The first generation of Merlos in Elizabeth, "Milk" Merlo Jr.'s direct ancestors, are indeed listed as "promoters" and "founders" of the Ribera Club at the time of the club's founding in 1923 alongside a very young Phil Amari, adding to the likelihood that Michele and Giuseppe Merlo were Cosa Nostra members if not something more as Charles Stango suggests. One of the founders too was Gioacchino Spinelli, a surname that connects to the Russellville, Alabama, colony.

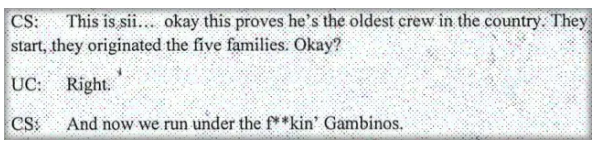

The Ribera Club was established on September 7, 1923. Promoters and founders were: Vincenzo Taormina, Calogero Zito, Pietro Cannata, Charles Coniglio, Joseph Triarsi, Michele Merlo, Nardo Cicurello, Calogero Sacturo, Ignazio Bonanda, Filippo Amari, Joseph Carlino, Vincenzo Bruno, Gioacchino Spinelli, Gioacchino Lo Brutto, Joseph Merlo. These individuals of Riberese origin were already in America for many rears.

The Ribera Club founders included the Merlos and Phil Amari.

The Merlos' multi-generation "Milk" nickname derives from the dairy farm operated by the Merlos many decades prior to Stango's comments about them starting the organization after arriving from Sicily, showing nicknames were hereditary as perhaps DeCavalcante membership is. Turncoat *capodecina* Anthony Rotondo, a second-generation Brooklyn member not of Sicilian descent, described how Family history and lore was passed down to future generations of members, indicating Stango too was specifically told about the group's origins and the Merlos' pivotal role in its development.

The First Family?

As evidenced by Michael DiLeonardo's knowledge of Gambino Family history, knowledge of forgotten eras in mafia history is better preserved when modern members share lineage with historic leaders. The persistence of Merlos and other descendants in the organization make DeCavalcante Family history easier to catalog within its ranks even if it is imperfect. In his recorded diatribes, Charles Stango told the undercover agent how the DeCavalcantes are "the oldest crew in the country" who "originated the five Families," not the other way around as is commonly assumed by mafia researchers. He reflected on this sadly, adding that despite this long history, "now we run under the fuckin' Gambinos," a reference not to the DeCavalcantes being formally absorbed by the Gambino Family but their subservient role to the larger New York group who has exercised authority over them since the 1980s.

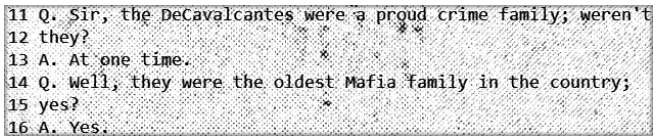

CS: This is sii… okay this proves he's the oldest crew in the country. They start, they originated the five families. Okay?

UC: Right.

CS: And now we run under the f**kin' Gambinos.

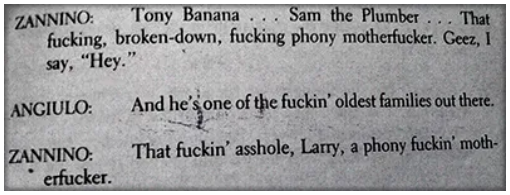
Stango believed the DeCavalcantes predated the New York Families.

This strange assertion about the DeCavalcantes being the “oldest” Family could be dismissed as manufactured self-importance on the part of Stango, but several other sources have made similar remarks. A number of years before Stango’s recorded comments, Anthony Rotondo testified in court that the DeCavalcante Family was the first mafia organization in the United States. When asked about this again under cross-examination he confirmed the statement. As with Stango, this was said wistfully, the testimony indicating the organization’s history was once a point of “pride” that had faded due to current circumstances.


11 Q. Sir, the DeCavalcantes were a proud crime family; weren't
12 they?
13 A. At one time.
14 Q. Well, they were the oldest Mafia family in the country;
15 yes?
16 A. Yes.

Rotondo, like Stango, believed the DeCavalcantes were the original Family.

Though he may have been subject to the same biases as Charles Stango given it was their own Family being referred to, or perhaps Stango was aware of Rotondo’s testimony and parroted it, a similar reference did surface decades earlier in another East Coast Family. Boston underboss Gennaro Angiulo was picked up on an FBI bug in early 1981 telling another high-ranking Family member that Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante ran "one of the fuckin’ oldest Families out there,” showing that this perception extended to cities outside of New Jersey and New York.


ZANNINO: Tony Banana . . . Sam the Plumber . . . That fucking, broken-down, fucking phony motherfucker. Geez, I say, “Hey.”

ANGIULO: And he’s one of the fuckin’ oldest families out there.

ZANNINO: That fuckin’ asshole, Larry, a phony fuckin’ motherfucker.

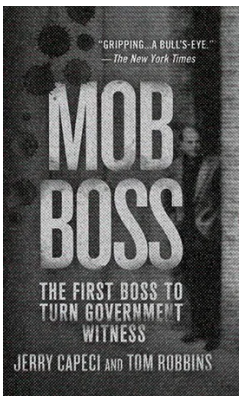
Angiulo echoed DeCavalcante members in recognizing their long history.

The Boston conversation too showed that Angiulo had an unfavorable opinion of Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante, making it unlikely the belief was biased in Sam’s favor. Angiulo’s comment about the Family’s history was expressed as if it was unfortunate that a man like DeCavalcante represented a group with this pedigree. In all three examples, these high-ranking members in New Jersey, New York, and Boston contrasted the age of the DeCavalcante Family with the belief that they had fallen from grace. Angiulo was non-Sicilian but as Boston underboss and de facto head of the area he was a spiritual successor to Gaspare Messina, whose ties to the Riberese Giuseppe Caterinicchia of Alabama are established.

The Messina-Caterinicchia financial transaction proves the Boston Family was familiar with Riberese mafiosi in Alabama dating back to 1923, the same year the Ribera Club was founded in New Jersey by DeCavalcante members. Gaspare Messina was a former New York resident who would live there again between 1927 and the early 1930s, suggesting the Boston organization was familiar with the nearby DeCavalcantes just as Messina knew of Caterinicchia in far-away Alabama. Whether anecdotal knowledge from Gaspare Messina carried down to Gerry Angiulo or he heard the rumor some other way, a Boston underboss believed the DeCavalcantes to have played a formative role in the American mafia much as the Family's own members did.

Former acting Lucchese boss Al D'Arco threw his own word-of-mouth account of American mafia history into the discussion in his memoir authored by Jerry Capeci, stating that Lucchese old timer Joe Schiavo, a close friend of Tommy Lucchese, told him that a New Jersey Family was not only the first organization in the New York metropolitan area, but the first Family in the United States. D'Arco was told the Lucchese Family split off from this New Jersey group, echoing Charles Stango's belief that the New York Families came from the DeCavalcantes.

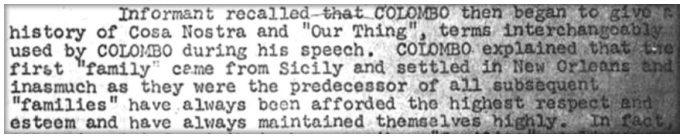
Al D'Arco referred to this early group as *La Chiesa* ("the Church"). D'Arco did not clarify if he was referring to the DeCavalcante Family or the separate Newark Family, which disbanded and was absorbed by several New York Familes in 1937, the same period the Alabama Family is said by Bill Bonanno to have been disbanded and placed under Lucchese boss Tom Gagliano's supervision. Former New Jersey-based Lucchese *capodecina* Anthony Accetturo said nothing about the first Family, but when he cooperated he was aware of the fact that the Lucchese Family's New Jersey faction had once been part of the defunct Newark Family though this doesn't explain D'Arco's highly-specific account of what he was told by a New York-based member about the "first" Family being in New Jersey.



D'Arco identified a New Jersey Family as the first American Family.

Charles Stango is certainly wrong about the Ribera-born Merlos playing any kind of direct role in the creation of the New York mafia even if they did help form the DeCavalcantes. Michele Merlo is the first known relative of his clan to have entered the United States in 1905 and Cosa Nostra had existed in America for decades by that time in other parts of the country as well as in New York for at least several years and likely much longer. Even 44-year-old Giuseppe Caterinicchia was established in Alabama at that time, likely already a made member in Sicily before his entry and no doubt part of whatever existed in Birmingham then. Stango may be right that the Merlos played a role in the formation of the DeCavalcante Family or even that the New York Riberese faction of the DeCavalcantes predated the New York Families given the presence of a Manhattan colony in the early 1890s. He is not correct about America as a whole, though.

Whether the DeCavalcantes were the first or simply one of the first American mafia organizations, this contrasts with significant evidence that New Orleans was the first city with a mafia presence, other Families in the South and Midwest soon following. In addition to documented mafia activity in New Orleans dating back to the middle of the 19th century, Brooklyn boss Joe Colombo told FBI informant Greg Scarpa in 1968 that New Orleans was the first American Family and as a result was given the honor of not being required to report to the national Commission. Colombo had just met with the New Orleans leadership prior to these comments.


Informant recalled that COLOMBO then began to give a history of Cosa Nostra and "Our Thing", terms interchangeably used by COLOMBO during his speech. COLOMBO explained that the first "family" came from Sicily and settled in New Orleans and inasmuch as they were the predecessor of all subsequent "families" have always been afforded the highest respect and esteem and have always maintained themselves highly. In fact,

Joe Colombo recognized New Orleans as the first Family.

While it is difficult to reconcile the extensive historical evidence on New Orleans with these anecdotal accounts of the DeCavalcante Family predating not only the New York Families but also most of the country, the fact that four high-ranking members of the DeCavalcante, Lucchese, and New Engand Families — two captains, an acting boss, and an underboss — believed something akin to this is significant and can't be dismissed outright. My own research has led me to conclude that the DeCavalcante Family at the very least did not start in New Jersey, with their origins in the area more likely tracing back to the 1892 Manhattan Riberese colony, but their creation as a whole is entirely myserious.

The early 1890s Manhattan colony included surnames that would produce DeCavalcante members in New York City like Galletta and Carubia. New York-

based DeCavalcante member Pietro Galletta was identified as one of the 1947 orphanage committee members discussed earlier while Anthony Carubia was another influential member based in New York. What's known of the Family's Manhattan-Queens element reflects Agrigento heritage and deep interrelation with other Riberesi of great prominece, including relation to the Chicago and Ribera Families in Sicily.

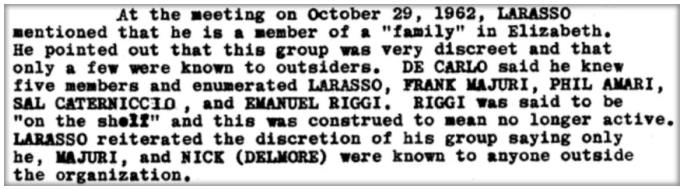
There were suspected members of this New York DeCavalcante group from neighboring villages like Caltabellotta, too, the same tiny hometown as early 1900s Manhattan "Black Hand" leader Pellegrino Mule, who shared his surname and hometown with Pasquale Lolordo's wife. Pasquale's brother Joseph Lolordo would be a *capodecina* with the Family's "old faction" and he lived with his brother's in-laws the Mules for a time. Pellegrino Mule could have been an early Manhattan DeCavalcante figure himself if they existed then and his Caltabellotta *compaesani* Accursio and Lorenzo Marsala were suspected members in New York later on, a possible indication of continuity.

It is felt that ACCURSIO and LORENZO may possibly be members of the old faction DE CAVALCANTE La Cosa Nostra "family."

Men from Caltabellotta were suspected of being "old faction" members.

The obscurity, insularity, and lack of known criminal activity of the historic DeCavalcante Family make it difficult to utilize outsider knowledge to understand their history but most insiders are of little help themselves. Greg Scarpa was inducted into the Colombo Family in 1951 by his own account and told the FBI in the 1960s he had only just learned of the DeCavalcante Family's existence despite the group having members in New York and New Jersey. Other member informants from the 1960s were similarly ignorant of DeCavalcante members in their midst and FBI documentation from the early part of the decade shows agents learning of the Family's existence in real time.

Former underboss Louis LaRasso, who reported directly to Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante and was related to the Merlos, was recorded around this time on an FBI bug speaking with New Jersey Genovese *capodecina* Ray DeCarlo, telling him the DeCavalcante Family didn't introduce the majority of their members to other mafia organizations. DeCarlo confirmed he could only name a handful of members despite sharing close proximity with the group in Union County and being one of the most well-connected mafia leaders in New Jersey. Obviously he knew Louis LaRasso given the two men were speaking, but the others he named were Phil Amari, Frank Majuri, Manny Riggi, and Salvatore Caterinicchio, DeCarlo essentially knowing only the Family leadership.



At the meeting on October 29, 1962, LARASSO mentioned that he is a member of a "family" in Elizabeth. He pointed out that this group was very discreet and that only a few were known to outsiders. DE CARLO said he knew five members and enumerated LARASSO, FRANK MAJURI, PHIL AMARI, SAL CATERNICCIO , and EMANUEL RIGGI. RIGGI was said to be "on the shelf" and this was construed to mean no longer active. LARASSO reiterated the discretion of his group saying only he, MAJURI, and NICK (DELMORE) were known to anyone outside the organization.

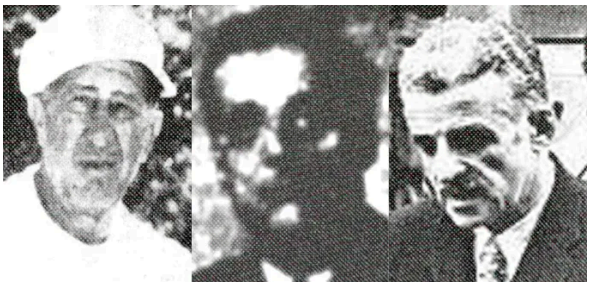
The DeCavalcantes avoided introducing members to other Families.

Some of the closest cross-Family relationships the DeCavalcantes had were to the Agrigento elements in other organizations. The Bonanno Family had a mysterious Agrigento-dominated New Jersey crew with members from Lucca Sicula and Alessandria della Rocca who associated closely with the DeCavalcantes, one of which was employed by the DeCavalcantes' Local 394. This member, Antonino Buscigilio, was the nephew of *capodecina* Angelo Salvo and was born in Alessandria della Rocca where he was reportedly inducted into Cosa Nostra before transferring to the Bonannos. The Gambino Family Arcuris of Manhattan and Queens also came from Alessandria della Rocca as well and were close to the Agrigentino DeCavalcante members in those boroughs.

This Agrigento-centrism and the ignorance of otherwise knowledgeable sources like Ray DeCarlo and Greg Scarpa make it difficult to assume anything about DeCavalcante history. LaRasso's recorded admission that this isolationism was by design should not be ignored, nor should the tendency for their Agrigentini members to engage in very little overt street crime. Before the 1960s, the DeCavalcante Family kept to themselves and were on one hand recognized within the formal mafia network but felt no obligation to be known. They were a true secret society informed by an attitude of Riberese *campanilismo*, which in turn informs us about their *compaesani* in Russellville and Birmingham, which included men who can be directly linked to Elizabeth and Manhattan, the most prominent of which died in New Jersey.

Though the DeCavalcante Family is heavily linked to their Riberese identity, they did not exclusively induct men from Agrigento or even Sicilian backgrounds as the similar Tampa Family tended to, nor did the DeCavalcantes require bosses to be Riberese. Phil Amari from Ribera is the first confirmed boss, one FBI source noting that Amari took over in the late 1930s, but his successor in the late 1950s was Nick Delmore, whose true name was Amoruso and came from the village of Nicosia in Enna, the same province Phil Amari's in-laws the Pinellis came from. Delmore's successor Sam Rizzo DeCavalcante, whose father Frank was an early *capodecina*, had heritage in Palermo and Monreale. Still, sources inside of the Family like later cooperating witness Anthony Rotondo have acknowledged the importance of Ribera and

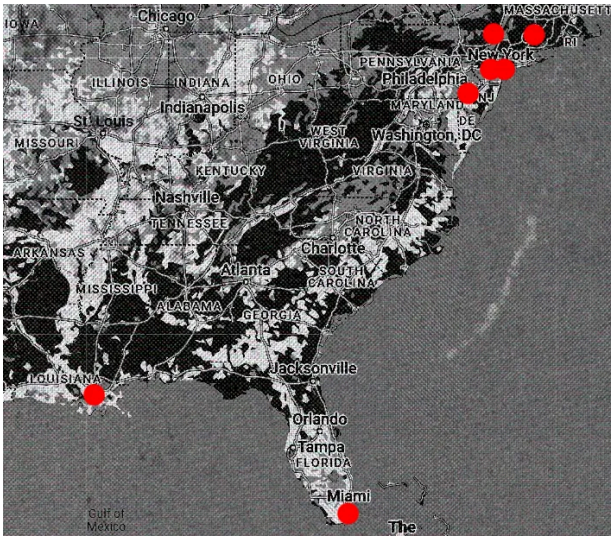
Agrigento to the organization's identity and even to an outside observer it is difficult to separate the DeCavalcantes from this part of Sicily.



Delmore (L), Frank Rizzo DeCavalcante (C), & son Sam (R).

Whether the DeCavalcante Family began as an obscure New York organization that gradually transplanted to New Jersey or if they were a faction of another New York Family that split off, we may have to look beyond geography to understand this oral history, which is of course subject to distortion as it was carried from mouth-to-mouth through both Sicilian dialect and English. DeCavalcante member Michael Aquilante, a non-Sicilian who resided in New Jersey and Connecticut at various times, lived in New Orleans for a time as a member of the New Jersey-based Family, showing that the DeCavalcante network had ties to an area that does correspond to the genesis of American Cosa Nostra.

It's unknown if Aquilante's presence in New Orleans was a one-off or if it's indicative of deeper ties the organization had to Louisiana. LCNBios noted that on one occasion in 1978, Aquilante visited acting boss John Riggi in New Jersey along with four other "unnamed individuals" from New Orleans. There is no indication whether these were members, associates, or random friends of Aquilante though it's extremely doubtful the DeCavalcates had five members in New Orleans. Sources in later years made no reference to Southern membership within the Family, historic or otherwise, but captains like Anthony Rotondo and Charles Stango nonetheless insist the DeCavalcante Family was the first to exist in the United States which, if true, would have to place their history in New Orleans in some way, shape, or form.



The DeCavalcantes were primarily an East Coast Family.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia passed through New Orleans prior to Alabama and indeed most Sicilians, Riberesi among them, would have arrived there prior to 1898 when New Orleans was still the primary port of entry for Italian immigrants. Nicola Gentile's contacts in New Orleans included men with heritage in Agrigento and most of the five remaining New Orleans Family members by 1968 also had roots in Agrigento province, high-ranking members like Carlos Marcello, the Gaglianos, and Vincenzo “Jimmy” Campo among them. Though there are no confirmed members from Ribera itself in the New Orleans Family's known history, it's possible Ribera surfaced in this New Orleans Agrigentini colony, as Western Sicilians from many if not most regions had residences there earlier in American history and mafiosi from Ribera did surface in Alabama by the 1890s. If so, perhaps the DeCavalcantes traced their lineage to an early Riberese colony in New Orleans that produced local mafia members and the finer details were lost over the following century.

Potentially negating this theory is that early New Orleans migration from Sicily appears to be primarily Palermitano with little evidence that Ribera or Agrigento supplied a significant number of immigrants to the United States until the end of the 19th century and I’m far from married to the prospect. This theory is entirely speculative, it being one way to understand how high-ranking East Coast mafiosi could come to believe the DeCavalcantes played a role in the development of the American mafia. If men from Ribera were among the first mafiosi in the United States and the DeCavalcantes saw themselves as the descendants of this *compaesani* group regardless of what this meant formally or geographically within Cosa Nostra, especially if there was blood relation and kinship connecting them, it could potentially reconcile some of these accounts. It doesn't reconcile Al D'Arco's belief that the first

Family was specifically located in New Jersey but it would explain the DeCavalcantes being credited by high-ranking members as a formative mafia group in the United States. Maybe this perception had less to do with the “DeCavalcantes” and more to do with Ribera, the distinction being lost among later generations of members.

Leaving the United States, there is evidence that the region surrounding Ribera in Agrigento was itself among the earliest mafia-influenced territories in Sicily. An 1828 investigation revealed that a ritualistic criminal secret society existed in villages like Cattolica Eraclea, Siculiana, and Burgio, this case resulting in the arrest of around 100 men, many of them said to be interrelated. One of the men arrested was said to be a priest in Burgio, priests later being identified as occasional Cosa Nostra members in Sicily. Joe Bonanno also stated in his autobiography that priests were inducted into his Family in New York City, though unlike Sicily there is no hard evidence of this phenomenon taking place in the United States.

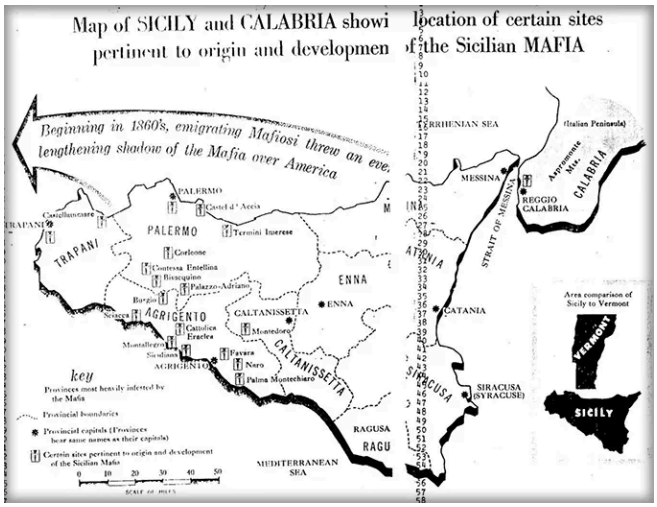
Cosa Nostra may have existed in Burgio as early as 1828.

References to Ribera don’t surface in the vague accounts of this 1828 investigation, but the *comune* sits directly between Siculiana and Burgio, both of which were mentioned in the case, making it almost certain Ribera residents were among those in the region connected to this regional "secret society" of criminals that included a religious figure. Some Riberese mafiosi trace their heritage back to Burgio, including Phil Bacino as noted earlier. Close association between Ribera and the villages identified in this case have continued to surface in modern investigations in the United States, Canada, and Sicily, the mafia in Agrigento being entirely symbiotic even when it transplants elsewhere.

In recent years Ribera is part of a *mandamento* (mafia district) controlled by the Burgio Family, the Ribera Family having had something of a fall from grace in Sicilian mafia politics following the murders of key leaders in an unhinged 1980s Sicilian mafia war provoked by the infamous Corleonesi. Carmelo Colletti, a Ribera leader murdered in 1983, was a cousin of the DeCavalcante

Family Collettis, two of which were part of the Ribera Club orphanage committee at different times. The Collettis have produced three generations of DeCavalcante members and the family has intermarried with relatives of longtime DeCavalcante *consigliere* Stefano Vitabile, who came to America from Ribera in the 1950s.

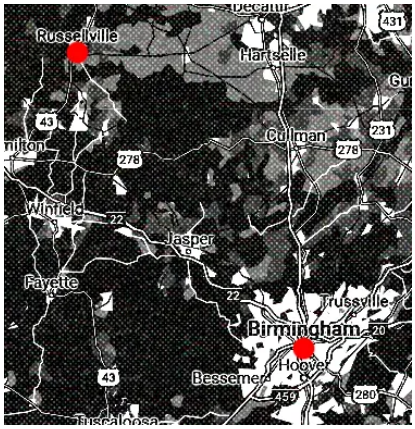
An FBI-produced map from 1958 based on information provided by Italian authorities marks locations believed to have been pivotal in the development of Sicilian Cosa Nostra. Locations noted on the map include the usual mafia haunts of Western Sicily, but a significant concentration of markings are found near the border between southern Palermo province and the western side of Agrigento. In fact, the entirety of Agrigento province is filled with markers, perhaps an indication this area was central to the origin of the mafia itself as the 1828 investigation might suggest. This Palermo-Agrigento border is also represented heavily in the history of American Cosa Nostra, including Alabama.



The Palermo-Agrigento border was apparently pivotal in mafia history.

This section is not intended to stray entirely from the topic of Alabama, but to provide an overview of how deep and pervasive these connections among Riberesi and Agrigentini are throughout known mafia history and to provide a foundation for the DeCavalcante Family, whose origins overlap with the Caterinicchia-Amari clan. In order to understand how Alabama mafiosi like Giuseppe Caterinicchia and Pasquale Amari fit into Cosa Nostra, these networks are a necessary part of the discussion; mafia Families did not form in a vacuum, nor did their leaders. Agrigento was and is a foundation of international Cosa Nostra, surfacing in rumors about the origins of the American mafia and there being evidence it played a role in the Sicilian mafia's development.

The broader Western Sicilian culture described in the historic report on Birmingham's Italian colonies stated that separate and distinct *compaesani*-based colonies maintained an attitude of hometown superiority via *campanilismo*: "my village is better than yours," as the report states. In the mafia, with its internal political rivalries, this would manifest organizationally, which we see in the form of Families and factions dominated by certain *compaesani* groups. Agrigento stands above the rest in this regard, with the Gambino Family's Manhattan Agrigento faction being given a high level of autonomy by boss Vincenzo Mangano as described by Nicola Gentile, Gentile himself tasked with representing this group on Mangano's behalf. This arrangement within the Gambinos complements groups like the DeCavalcantes and Tampa who organized their own insular Agrigento-centric Families, as well as the Alabama mafia's Riberesi initially sequestering themselves in Russellville far from the city of Birmingham. Even Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi of Ribera had this attitude, allegedly dreaming of an international Riberese empire rather than one that was simply Sicilian or Italian in nature.



Insularity is common with Agrigento mafiosi, as we see in Russellville.

Longtime Philadelphia member Harry Riccobene was an FBI informant who later gave interviews from prison. Riccobene was inducted into Cosa Nostra in 1927 as a teenager, his father being an early Philadelphia member, and Riccobene stated in interviews that his ancestors were members in Castrogiovanni (now Enna). Riccobene told the FBI that Philadelphia originally had multiple small Families each with their own boss that were later merged into what we now know as the lone Philadelphia Family. Riccobene elaborated on these comments in his later interviews from prison, stating that these Philadelphia Families were limited to specific sets of *compaesani* and it was only later that men from different Sicilian hometowns and regions were allowed to share membership in the same Family.

The May 2014 issue of Informer Journal found evidence that Harry Riccobene's recollections about Philadelphia were mirrored in the origins of the New York Families, successfully arguing that these separate organizations were informed by distinct *compaesani* identities. The DeCavalcante Family's roots as an aloof New York-New Jersey organization separate from the five Families may have foundations in this distinction between mafiosi from different hometowns, men from Agrigento making this an even higher priority than their mafia peers. Whether this was true in smaller mafia territories outside of major metropolitan areas is anyone's guess, though the existence of separate Families in San Jose and San Francisco could tell us it wasn't unheard of around the country to maintain small, distinct Families who operated side-by-side in nearby areas rather than swelling into one bloated "Crime Family" like we see in other locations. Drawing back to New Orleans, it's possible Lousiana once originally had multiple Families defined by different *compaesani* identities, Ribera or Agrigento being one of them and providing some level of continuity with the DeCavalcantes and Riberese colonies elsewhere.

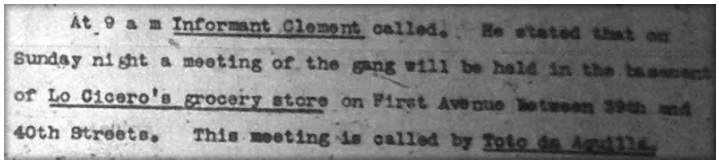
We are blind when speculating about the Alabama mafia's internal politics and even that's being generous. There is evidence, however, that the Ribera and Castelvetrano elements of Russellville and Birmingham were not the only sets of *compaesani* that supplied mafia members to the area. The Sicilian population in the Birmingham area was populated by immigrants from many different villages where the provincial borders of Palermo, Agrigento, Trapani, and Caltanissetta meet. Bisacquino specifically provided a third of the local Sicilian population and like Ribera, Bisacquino was an important mafia village, making it likely that some of the Birmingham Family included Bisacquinesi. To understand Bisacquino, we must discuss the Gambino Family and its own branch of the Agrigento network even though Bisacquino itself is not in Agrigento — technically.

Enter the Gambino Family

This article's examination of the Riberesi in various American Cosa Nostra Families shows that men from this village remained heavily connected not just within the continental United States after emigrating from Sicily, but as we see with the DeCavalcante and Chicago Family Riberesi, they had relatives in the Ribera Family and a strong degree of fluidity between their US and Sicilian elements. Regardless of their formal affiliation within a given regional Family, it's apparent that mafiosi from Ribera regarded each other as a unified entity, a pattern evident not only in Ribera but Agrigento as a whole. This is a slightly expanded variation of the same *campanilismo* described in the report on

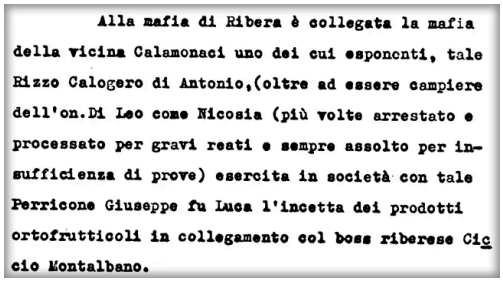
Birmingham's Sicilian colonies, this *campanilismo* being more provincial in spirit.

Nicola Gentile's memoir and address book reveal the Agrigento network to be tightly-knit both nationally and internationally. Gentile's time with the Gambino Family also sheds light on potential connections between the Gambino Family's large Agrigento faction and the DeCavalcantes. The most prominent Gambino *capodecina* within their Agrigento faction by the early 1920s was Vincenzo LoCicero, whose brother Filippo was also a known mafioso dating back earlier in the century. The Secret Service was aware of Filippo LoCicero hosting an important Family meeting at his place of business in New York on at least one occasion on behalf of Salvatore D'Aquila shortly after D'Aquila became boss and *capo dei capi* in 1912.


At 9 a m Informant Clement called. He stated that on Sunday night a meeting of the gang will be held in the basement of Lo Cicero's grocery store on First Avenue between 39th and 40th Streets. This meeting is called by Toto da Aquila.

LoCiceros' early links to D'Aquila are established. Credit: Angelo Santino.

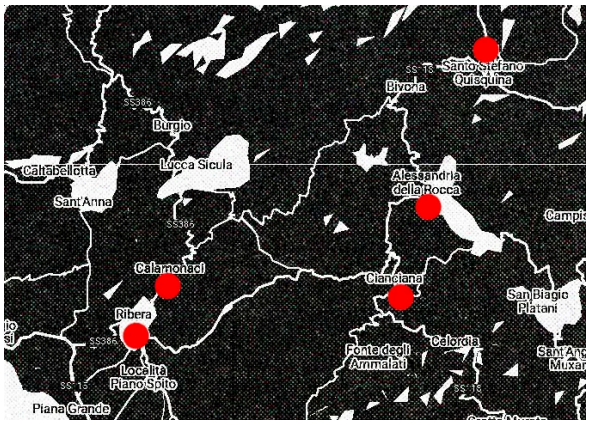
Nicola Gentile was himself greeted by Vincenzo LoCicero in Kansas City shortly after his arrival to America in the early 1900s. LoCicero was visiting Missouri for reasons unknown and offered to wait with Gentile whose brother would soon be arriving from a remote labor colony. The Gentiles being from Siculiana likely provided common ground with the LoCiceros who came from Calamonaci, a micro-*comune* neighboring Ribera that was described by Italian authorities in the 1950s as having mafiosi closely involved with the Ribera Family. Recent Italian investigations indicate that a small Family of its own may exist in Calamonaci despite its small size and close proximity to larger Ribera. Filippo LoCicero had a son born in Ribera, where there were likely better medical resources than tiny Calamonaci, and his brother Vincenzo's own son, Gambino member Felice LoCicero, would move to Tampa where he closely associated with the local Agrigento-dominated Family, noted for its ties to the DeCavalcantes.


Alla mafia di Ribera è collegata la mafia della vicina Calamonaci uno dei cui esponenti, tale Rizzo Calogero di Antonio,(oltre ad essere campiere dell'on.Di Leo come Nicosia (più volte arrestato e processato per gravi reati e sempre assolto per insufficienza di prove) esercita in società con tale Perricone Giuseppe fu Luca l'incetta dei prodotti ortofrutticoli in collegamento col boss riberese Ciccio Montalbano.

The Ribera Family worked closely with figures in Calamonaci.

Filippo LoCicero's son, also named Felice, married a woman named Montalbano from Caltabellotta, another DeCavalcante-linked village, and the same 1950s Italian report that described links between Ribera and Calamonaci mafia figures also stated that the Ribera Family boss was a Francesco "Ciccio" Montalbano. A Mule, first name unknown, was identified by early Secret Service informant Salvatore Clemente as a LoCicero associate, drawing back to the New York Mules from Caltabellotta like Pellegrino Mule and Pasquale Lolordo's in-laws.

Much as the DeCavalcantes had and perhaps still have a symbiotic relationship with Ribera, the Tampa organization had similar fluidity with villages like Santo Stefano Quisquina, Alessandria della Rocca, and Cianciana, all a short distance from Ribera and Calamonaci. Some members of the DeCavalcante Family were born in Tampa to parents from Alessandria della Rocca and at least two of them maintained residences in remote Marlboro, New York. That these similar origins recur in the Gambino, DeCavalcante, and Tampa Families is a result of how close these villages are in Sicily and how this network attached itself to different locations, though we are still in the dark about how early on this network began influencing the American mafia.



A small section of Agrigento connects New York, New Jersey, and Florida.

Manhattan Gambino *capodecina* Domenico Arcuri and his successor, son Joseph Arcuri, descended from Alessandria della Rocca and originally settled in Tampa where they shared baptismal relationships with the Trafficantes and served as liaisons between the Gambino Family and Tampa after moving to New York. Similarly, Joe Arcuri served as the liaison to the DeCavalcante Family and a brother of the earlier mentioned DeCavalcante figures Carmelo and Lorenzo Giacobbe lived in the Arcuri-owned Manhattan apartment building where the Arcuris themselves resided. Public records show the Arcuris and LoCiceros to have been closely involved with one another in

Manhattan, Vincenzo LoCicero's son Felice even witnessing Domenico Arcuri's naturalization.

Michael DiLeonardo has stated that his grandfather Vincenzo was a close friend of mafiosi from Ribera and Agrigento. The elder DiLeonardo was a Gambino *capodecina* in the 1920s, the same rank as his Gambino contemporary Vincenzo LoCicero, whose family ties to Ribera and birth in Calamonaci, essentially a neighborhood of Ribera, were described above. Michael knew the Arcuri crew to be close to older members of his own crew along with members of the like-minded Giuseppe Traina crew of Brooklyn as well, Traina tracing his prominence in the Family back to the 1910s. The Arcuris likely trace their crew back to the one run by Vincenzo LoCicero, who died of natural causes in 1923.

Joe Arcuri played a major role in the later Agrigento network.

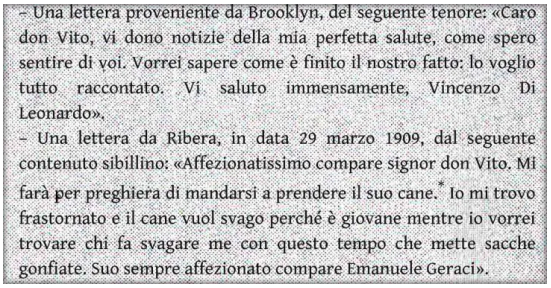
Vincenzo DiLeonardo was a close friend of Giuseppe Traina, whose *decina* in later decades would include member Vincent "Jimmy" Sarullo. Sarullo's family descended from Ribera and Sarullo closely associated with DeCavalcante figures on Staten Island. According to Anthony Rotondo, Jimmy Sarullo was one of the first men who heard rumors that DeCavalcante Family leader John D'Amato was involved in homosexual activity that contributed to his murder, though Sarullo himself was not linked to the conspiracy. The Sarullo name is associated with the mafia in Ribera and there were Sarullos who intermarried with DeCavalcante members though a relation to Jimmy Sarullo of the Gambinos is unknown. Michael DiLeonardo was acquainted with Jimmy Sarullo himself, Sarullo being among the old timers DiLeonardo chatted with in Brooklyn social clubs. Sarullo was noted by DiLeonardo as being close to the Arcuri crew, unsurprisingly.

Gambino member Jimmy Sarullo traced his heritage to Ribera.

Vincenzo DiLeonardo's ties to other Agrigento-born mafiosi are also known. Among his closest friends were Gambino members Andrea Torregrossa from Licata, who traveled to Sicily with DiLeonardo in 1929, as well as Onofrio Modica, a native of Sciacca just south of Ribera on the Agrigento coast. Michael DiLeonardo states that despite an invisible provincial border, his ancestral hometown of Bisacquino has a stronger cultural affinity with nearby Agrigento villages than it does other parts of Palermo province, with Bisacquino and Agrigento sharing a similar dialect and attitude.

Michael DiLeonardo was raised hearing stories about Bisacquino and its important role in mafia history, much as DeCavalcante members heard similar stories about their own roots. Michael was told of his family's ties to infamous Bisacquino boss Vito Cascio Ferro and how Cascio Ferro played a role in his grandfather and great-grandfather's immigration to the United States. This relationship is confirmed through a letter between Vincenzo DiLeonardo and Cascio Ferro obtained by Italian authorities in 1909.

Vito Cascio Ferro is evidence himself of the close ties between Bisacquino and Agrigento. Cascio Ferro's father Accursio was born in Siculiana, his first name being found almost exclusively in this coastal area, and the family spent substantial time in Agrigento before son Vito was born. The family had strong ties to Burgio specifically and lived there for a period. Though Vito was born in Palermo *citta* and is most known for his residence in Bisacquino, he spent time living in Sambuca di Sicilia which neighbors Ribera. Along with the letter from Vincenzo DiLeonardo, another letter was found in Vito Cascio Ferro's home during the same 1909 police raid in which a man from Ribera speaks to Cascio Ferro in bizarre code, its meaning no doubt pertaining to underworld affairs much as DiLeonardo's vague letter suggests a similar purpose.

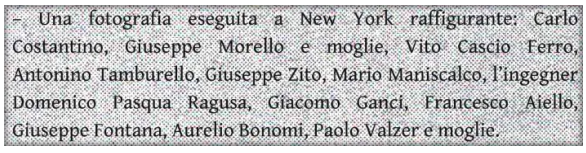


– Una lettera proveniente da Brooklyn, del seguente tenore: «Caro don Vito, vi dono notizie della mia perfetta salute, come spero sentire di voi. Vorrei sapere come è finito il nostro fatto: lo voglio tutto raccontato. Vi saluto immensamente, Vincenzo Di Leonardo».
– Una lettera da Ribera, in data 29 marzo 1909, dal seguente contenuto sibillino: «Affezionatissimo compare signor don Vito. Mi farà per preghiera di mandarsi a prendere il suo cane.* Io mi trovo frastornato e il cane vuol svago perché è giovane mentre io vorrei trovare chi fa svagare me con questo tempo che mette sacche gonfiate. Suo sempre affezionato compare Emanuele Geraci».

Cascio Ferro received letters from DiLeonardo and a Riberese man in 1909.

Another item of interest obtained during the raid on Cascio Ferro's home was a photograph of Vito Cascio Ferro during his residence in New York City several years earlier. The photograph featured Cascio Ferro, *capo dei capi* Giuseppe Morello from Corleone, Carlo Costantino from Partinico, and Giuseppe Fontana, likely the one from Resuttana identified as a prominent Palermo mafioso in the turn-of-the-century Italian Sangiorgi Report. Morello, Costantino, and Fontana also attended Cascio Ferro's welcome dinner when he first arrived to New York City and these men appear to have represented what are now known as the Genovese/Lucchese (later split), Bonanno, and Gambino Families, respectively. Among other men in the photo whose mafia activity can't be substantiated were Mario Maniscalco from Sciacca and an Antonino Tamburello, a surname common in Bisacquino.

While I have not seen the photograph in question, the order that authorities used when listing the names could indicate which men were standing next to one another. Antonino Tamburello is listed next to Vito Cascio Ferro suggesting they were standing in tandem. The most viable candidate for Tamburello was an Antonino Tamburello born in 1841 who came to the United States from Bisacquino in 1899, several years after the DiLeonardos and two years before Vito Cascio Ferro, listing a relative with the same surname in New Orleans as his arrival contact. Vito Cascio Ferro himself passed through New Orleans during his travels and it opens the possibility that Cascio Ferro had contact with his *compaesani* in Birmingham as well.



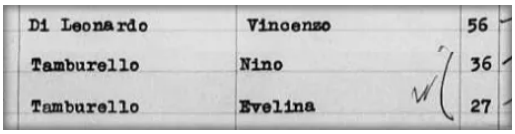
– Una fotografia eseguita a New York raffigurante: Carlo Costantino, Giuseppe Morello e moglie, Vito Cascio Ferro, Antonino Tamburello, Giuseppe Zito, Mario Maniscalco, l'ingegner Domenico Pasqua Ragusa, Giacomo Ganci, Francesco Aiello, Giuseppe Fontana, Aurelio Bonomi, Paolo Valzer e moglie.

Cascio Ferro was photographed with the mysterious Antonino Tamburello.

Bisacquino is a small village and little is known about its Cosa Nostra members beyond some of the names discussed here. The name of the *comune* translates to “Father of the Knife” in reference to its history of producing knives with handles made of goat horns, an incredible fit for a location linked to Cosa Nostra. Michael DiLeonardo was told his great-grandfather Antonino, born in

1837, was a Sicilian mafia member in Bisacquino prior to entering the United States in the 1890s, making him a contemporary of Antonino Tamburello and an elder mafioso within the tight-knit Bisacquinese network that produced their mutual friend Cascio Ferro. Antonino DiLeonardo, who died in 1927 in New York City, was likely a retired member of the future Gambino Family given his son Vincenzo was a *capodecina* under boss Salvatore D'Aquila at the time of his father's death.

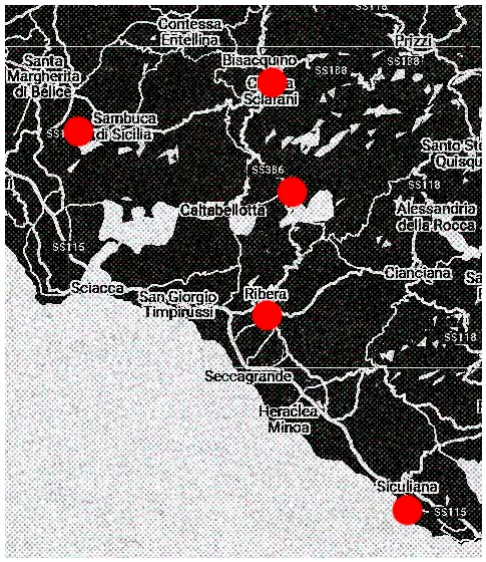
Connecting some of these names further is a trip Vincenzo DiLeonardo took to Sicily in 1936. On the same ship was a Nino Tamburello, a 36-year-old resident of Long Island. Tamburello is not placed next to DiLeonardo on the manifest, though other immigration records show traveling companions aren't always listed together. This Nino Tamburello's name and age could make him a grandson or another young relative of the Antonino Tamburello photographed with Vito Cascio Ferro if indeed both Tamburellos were from Bisacquino. Whatever the connection, if any, the Tamburello name repeatedly surfaces in connection with known Bisacquino-born mafia members. Immigration records unsurprisingly show that Tamburellos from Bisacquino headed to Birmingham though none can be linked to mafia activity.



Di Leonardo	Vincenzo	56
Tamburello	Nino	36
Tamburello	Evelina	27

DiLeonardo traveled with a Nino Tamburello in 1936. (Placement edited)

A deeper look into Sicilian birth records shows the Tamburello name was common in Bisacquino as far back as the 1700s. The name is also common in Accursio Cascio Ferro's hometown of Siculiana and other Agrigento villages like Ribera, Sambuca di Sicilia, and Santo Stefano Quisquina, all villages that fed into Birmingham. Michael DiLeonardo, a former Cosa Nostra leader and not an academic, was anecdotally aware of cultural affinity between Bisacquino and Agrigento, an observation supported by the prevalence of common surnames in both areas and other documented connections between these locations.



Bisacquino's geography (top) ties it to relevant Agrigento villages.

Returning to Vito Cascio Ferro's friend Antonino Tamburello, the most likely candidate was from Bisacquino and arrived to New Orleans in 1899 with his wife, maiden name Caronna. Interestingly, Vincenzo "Jimmy" Caronna was a Bisacquino-born Gambino member in Baltimore and another Baltimore Gambino member was Giuseppe Tamburello, born in Sambuca di Sicilia. That Vito Cascio Ferro was close to an Antonino Tamburello whose wife was apparently a Caronna and later two Baltimore Gambino members named Caronna and Tamburello descended from Bisacquino and Sambuca where Vito Cascio Ferro lived at different times is the sort of coincidence that typically but not always indicates deeper connections and patterns of association.

Michael DiLeonardo knew his grandfather Vincenzo to have close ties to Baltimore and recalled how a crippled Baltimore man accused of murdering a cop hid out in his grandfather's home for a period of years to evade law enforcement. Michael lived next door to his grandfather and spent most of his childhood coming and going from Vincenzo's house, giving him firsthand experience with this unknown Baltimore man who was apparently capable of great violence despite his physical predicament (unless his condition was a byproduct of the incident in question). Michael does not know who this man was and I've been unable to pinpoint the murder in question.

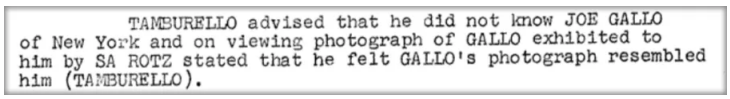
Joe N. Gallo, who served as Family *consigliere* under multiple Family bosses, had heritage in Bisacquino, a fact shared with Michael DiLeonardo by older members during his early days with the Gambino Family. Gallo attended Vincenzo DiLeonardo's funeral and Michael knew of longstanding ties between their families along with two other Bisacquinese Gambino members, Saverio “Sam” and Luigi “Louis” Rumore, who DiLeonardo knew to control a Coca-Cola workers' union and belonged to the same Manhattan-Queens crew

as Gallo. He stated the Rumore's father was a close friend of his grandfather, as was Joe N. Gallo's father Michele. The Rumores came up in the Joe Riccobono *decina* alongside Joe N. Gallo, while the DiLeonardos belonged to a separate *decina* based primarily in Brooklyn but their *compaesani* ties brought the men together.

Joe N. Gallo was close to other members with Bisacquino heritage.

Like Vincenzo DiLeonardo, Joe N. Gallo had ties to Baltimore. Extensive FBI reporting notes that Gallo was the Family liaison to Baltimore, traveling there frequently since the 1940s though his presence in the area slowed down if not ceased entirely when he took on the responsibility of *consigliere* in the 1960s. An FBI report even notes that Joe N. Gallo was a candidate to become *capodecina* over Baltimore though this never came to fruition as he instead took on greater stature within New York City. One Baltimore informant described how Gallo took an aggressive approach while shaking down local racketeers during his visits to Baltimore, playing something of a "bad cop" in contrast to the ostensibly legitimate and largely passive Baltimore-based Gambino members who focused on their food businesses.

In Baltimore, Gallo naturally had contact with Jimmy Caronna and Giuseppe Tamburello, from Bisacquino and Sambuca respectively, though Tamburello pleaded ignorance during an FBI interview when he was shown a photo of Gallo. Humorously, Tamburello told the FBI in broken English that he saw a resemblance between himself and the photo of Gallo, though I hesitate to read into his remark. Tamburello owned an Italian specialty shop and his brother Nicola had been a mafioso in Youngstown, Ohio, where Giuseppe also lived prior to Baltimore. Nicola Tamburello himself was in Baltimore before Youngstown, Nicola being arrested there in 1929 for bootlegging after having entered the country illegally in 1926. He was later deported while living in Youngstown.


TAMBURELLO advised that he did not know JOE GALLO
of New York and on viewing photograph of GALLO exhibited to
him by SA ROTZ stated that he felt GALLO's photograph resembled
him (TAMBURELLO).

Tamburello of Baltimore felt he resembled Joe N. Gallo.

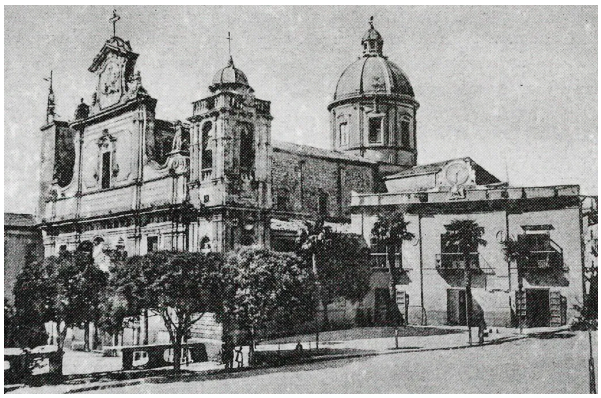
As a later member of the Gambinos, Michael DiLeonardo was aware of the tendency for his Bisacquinese *compaesani* to end up with the Gambino Family for reasons unknown to both of us. Bisacquino's geographic location would lend itself to the Corleone-centric Lucchese and Genovese Families that recruited heavily from that area of interior Palermo yet virtually all known East Coast mafiosi from Bisacquino became Gambino members in both New York City and Baltimore. Even the Traina crew's Manninos, the mafiosi sons of a Gambino member from Torretta, had a mother from Bisacquino named Rumore and they too belonged to the Gambinos like Gallo, the DiLeonardos, and Rumore brothers.

Vito Cascio Ferro's formal affiliation in New York is unknown.

Michael DiLeonardo and I both suspect Vito Cascio Ferro could have been a member of the future Gambino Family based on these relationships and patterns, though no sources from the era can confirm or deny this arrangement and Cascio Ferro had ties to every prominent figure in New York at the time regardless of the formal organization he belonged to. Along with the letter from Vincenzo DiLeonardo of the Gambino Family, the 1909 raid on Cascio Ferro's home did reveal correspondence with a Riccobono from New York, the surname of an important Palermitano clan in Gambino Family history that produced Joe N. Gallo and the Rumore brothers' captain Joe Riccobono. That Vito Cascio Ferro had correspondence with his *compaesano* DiLeonardo as well as a Riccobono, a surname that would supervise younger Bisacquinesi in the Gambino Family, is an interesting coincidence. It is difficult to infer much about Cascio Ferro's affiliation in New York from this alone, though, as he was also extremely close to Corleonese boss Giuseppe Morello, as was another Bisacquino-born mafioso in New York named Giuseppe Boscarino.

A factor to consider beyond Cascio Ferro's general associations is his heritage. Vito was not simply Bisacquinese, he was born in Palermo *citta*, a foundation of the Gambino Family, but of greater significance is that his father was born in Siculiana and some sources have identified Accursio Cascio Ferro as a mafia

figure himself, placing Accursio's own point of entry into the mafia in coastal Agrigento. In addition to his birth in Nicola Gentile's hometown of Siculiana, Gentile himself later joining the Gambino Family, Accursio Cascio Ferro later took his family to the villages of Burgio and Villafranca Sicula, Agrigento villages in close proximity with Ribera where an apparent mafioso sent a letter to his son Vito in 1909.



Bisacquino's *Chiesa Madre*.

Vito Cascio Ferro's time in Bisacquino informed much of his identity, a fact well-known to his close *compaesani* the DiLeonardos, but his residence in Sambuca di Sicilia and his family's history in other Agrigento towns like Siculiana, Villafranca Sicula, and Burgio show him to be the product of an Agrigento network. That Michael DiLeonardo knew Bisacquino to share an affinity with Agrigento and was aware of his grandfather's relationship to mafiosi from Ribera makes the provincial distinction with Bisacquino in Palermo a triviality. Agrigento is heavily associated with the Gambino Family for reasons we don't know given the Family's roots are found in Palermo *citta*, but this relationship dates back to the Family's early history and Vito Cascio Ferro's personal history in Agrigento may have informed his trajectory.

Evidence of Vito Cascio Ferro's formal stature in New York came from a confiscated letter Giuseppe Morello wrote to Chicago leader Rosario Dispenza in 1909 where Morello criticized Cascio Ferro and his close Palermitano friend Pasquale Enea, describing how the two men violated an early mafia rule by inducting a member into Cosa Nostra without consulting the recruit's hometown *compaesani*, showing Cascio Ferro was not only in a position to sponsor members in New York but that protocol at that time required a proposed member's *compaesani* be consulted prior to induction. Both Cascio Ferro and Enea became bosses after returning to Sicily where they continued to associate, the two men named as suspected conspirators in the murder of NYPD anti-mafia detective Joe Petrosino in 1909.

That Vito Cascio Ferro and Pasquale Enea became Sicilian mafia bosses and previously sponsored or inducted members in New York does not necessarily indicate they were Family *rappresentanti* in America. Induction ceremonies don't require the presence of a boss — Michael DiLeonardo says two captains must attend, at least in his era — but Morello's criticism of Cascio Ferro and Enea does suggest the two men held influential roles and belonged to the same organization. Whatever the case, we lack the sources to confirm Vito Cascio Ferro's formal affiliation in New York and any interpretation among dedicated researchers is reasonable.

The level of interconnectivity between mafia members from the same villages in different parts of the United States is dizzying and writing about them borders on schizophrenic. Bisacquino shows up even less than Ribera in documented Cosa Nostra activity, the notoriety of Vito Cascio Ferro being a significant exception, but the relationships found in these villages show similar tendencies that raise questions about Alabama, where both Bisacquino and Ribera surface. Joe N. Gallo is one definitive link between the New York Bisacaquinesi and their *compaesani* in Alabama.

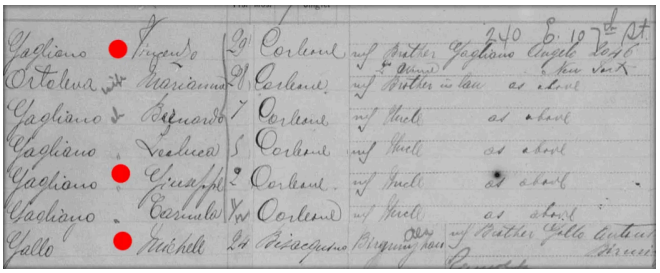
Joe N. Gallo's Southern Ties

Relevant to this article is Joe N. Gallo's 1912 birthplace: Bessemer, Alabama, a mining community that formed at the edge of Birmingham. The Caterinicchia-Amari-Mangiaracina clan of Russellville also had ties to Bessemer, with DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari's aunt Giuseppa and her husband Giuseppe Mangiaracina living in Bessemer after leaving Russellville. The degree to which the Gallos' presence in Bessemer overlapped with this Castelvetrano-Ribera clan's time there is unknown, if they overlapped at all, but Giuseppa Amari Mangiaracina's hometown of Ribera is close to Bisacquino and various Sicilians coalesced in Bessemer.

Bessemer was a popular destination for Birmingham Sicilians.

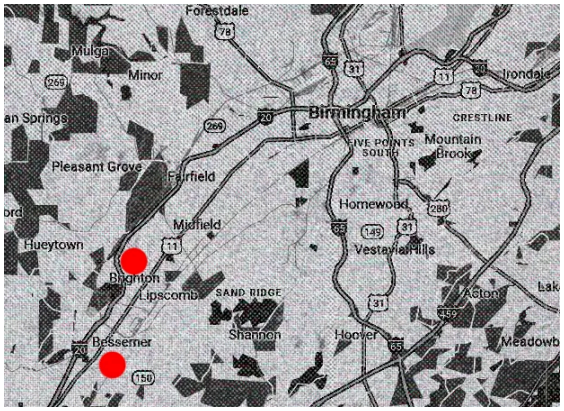
Joe N. Gallo's father Michele Gallo, born 1881, arrived to the United States in late 1905, heading to Birmingham from Bisacquino where his brother Antonino Gallo already resided. A Vincenzo Gagliano from Corleone was on the same ship with Michele Gallo, heading to his brother Angelo in New York City. Angelo Gagliano was a prominent Morello Family member in East Harlem whose son-in-law Vincenzo Rao later became Lucchese Family *consigliere*, much as Michele's son Joe became the Gambino *consigliere*. Angelo Gagliano's nephew Joseph was on the ship with his father Vincenzo, Joseph Gagliano being notorious drug trafficker "Pip the Blind" and a future member like brother-in-law Rao.

While Michele Gallo is listed on the same page of the manifest as the Gaglianos, he is listed at the opposite end of the page with no indication they deliberately traveled together. This immigration connection between mafia-linked figures from Bisacquino and neighboring Corleone brings to mind Vito Cascio Ferro's close relationship to Giuseppe Morello, an intimate of these Gaglianos who served as their boss, though Cascio Ferro had returned to Sicily by the time Gallo arrived to Birmingham alongside the Gaglianos heading to New York. There was a short overlap between Vito Cascio Ferro's return and Michele Gallo's departure, though unlike the DiLeonardos it is unknown if the Gallos knew Cascio Ferro.



Gallo's father arrived with Morello Family figures. (Placement edited)

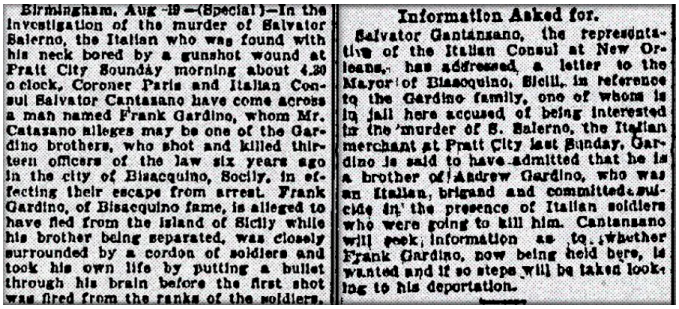
Had these Morello Family Gaglianos been heading to Birmingham like Michele Gallo, it would add substance to Bill Bonanno's belief that their Corleonese *compaesano* Tom Gagliano was tasked with representing the Birmingham Family following its break-up. As it is now, it is a curious coincidence that does peripherally link Corleone to another mafia-connected family in Alabama though nothing more can be inferred. If Michele Gallo did know the Corleonese Gaglianos he arrived with, it adds to our curiosity as to why men with roots in Bisacquino joined the Gambino Family, Gallo's son among them.



The Gallos lived in Bessemer (bottom) and neighboring Brighton (top).

Michele Gallo was already married in Bisacquino before his arrival to the United States and a daughter was born in Sicily in 1906 close to 9 months after Gallo departed for the United States. Gallo's wife, Francesca Giardina, temporarily remained behind in Bisacquino but Gallo's wife and daughter joined him in Alabama shortly after the daughter's birth, heading to Michele who was then living in Brighton next to Bessemer. Accompanying Francesco Giardina Gallo upon her arrival to the United States was a large group of Bisacquinesi, some heading to another Alabama colony while others headed to Manhattan where the Gallos themselves eventually moved.

Gallo's mother being a Giardina brings with it potential underworld connections in both Birmingham and Bisacquino. A murder occurred in the Birmingham Sicilian community in 1903 when merchant Salvatore Salerno of Pratt City, Birmingham, was allegedly killed by a man named Francesco "Gardino", his nephews Tony “Gardino” and Joe Latino being two additional suspects. “Gardino” descended from Bisacquino and was said to have fled to America after murdering a whopping thirteen law enforcement officers in Bisaquino in tandem with his brother Andrea. Andrea “Gardino” reportedly committed suicide in Sicily during a standoff with police.



Birmingham, Aug 19—(Special)—In the investigation of the murder of Salvator Salerno, the Italian who was found with his neck bored by a gunshot wound at Pratt City Sounday morning about 4.30 o clock, Coroner Paris and Italian Consul Salvator Cantasano have come across a man named Frank Gardino, whom Mr. Catasano alleges may be one of the Gardino brothers, who shot and killed thirteen officers of the law six years ago in the city of Bisacquino, Socily, in effecting their escape from arrest. Frank Gardino, of Bisacquino fame, is alleged to have fled from the island of Sicily while his brother being separated, was closely surrounded by a cordon of soldiers and took his own life by putting a bullet through his brain before the first shot was fired from the ranks of the soldiers.

Information Asked for.

Salvator Cantansano, the representative of the Italian Consul at New Orleans, has addressed a letter to the Mayor of Bisacquino, Sicili, in reference to the Gardino family, one of whom is in jail here accused of being interested in the murder of S. Salerno, the Italian merchant at Pratt City last Sunday. Gardino is said to have admitted that he is a brother of Andrew Gardino, who was an Italian, brigand and committed suicide in the presence of Italian soldiers who were going to kill him. Cantansano will seek information as to whether Frank Gardino, now being held here, is wanted and if so steps will be taken looking to his deportation.

Frank “Gardino” was linked to extreme violence in Bisacquino.

No records exist for the surname "Gardino" in Bisacquino and newspapers frequently butchered Italian surnames, making it likely the "Gardino" brothers

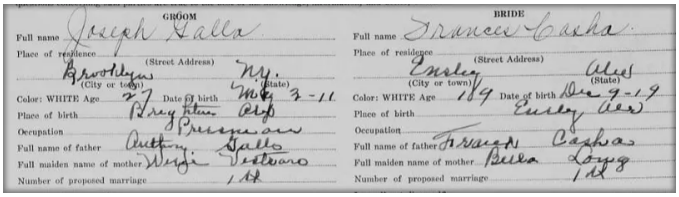
were in fact named Giardina like Joe N. Gallo's mother. The Giardina name is found heavily in Bisacquino and there is little indication a more suitable alternative exists. Francesco Giardina was arrested before Michele Gallo's arrival and I'm unable to determine what became of him. A possible match for Francesco's brother Andrea Giardina in Bisacquino shows their mother to be a Salerno, the same surname as the man killed in Birmingham. Giardina's nephews were both born in the 1870s and lived in Alabama by 1903, "Tony Gardino" being Antonino Giardina and Joe Latino being Giuseppe Latino. A descendant of these men informed me that they were all related to the Salernos as well as to the Lorino name, another surname connected to Joe N. Gallo. Latino in fact was arrested while paying for the funeral of Salvatore Salerno though charges were subsequently dropped.

No available information links Michele Gallo himself to underworld activity in Birmingham. Gallo worked in Alabama as a miner, this trade's crucial role in bringing Sicilians to Birmingham no exception for the Gallos. There were Rumores from Bisacquino living near the Gallos when they moved to Bessemer, their relationship to Gallo's Bisacquinese friends in the Gambino Family unknown, but the Gallos' proximity to Rumores in both Alabama and New York City hint at more connections between the two Bisacquinese families and the colonies in Alabama and New York.

The Gallos were tied to *compaesani* in New York as well as Alabama.

A second Gallo daughter was born in Alabama in 1910, around two years before Joe's birth, but the family had moved to New York by 1920 when a third daughter was born. The family resided in Lower Manhattan where Michele Gallo worked as a blacksmith and then a machinist. Michele's brother Antonino Gallo and his family, including his own son Joseph born in Brighton the year before his Bessemer-born cousin Joe N. Gallo, also moved to New York City from Alabama. Antonino Gallo's wife was a Vetrano from Bisacquino, a surname that accompanied Michele's wife Francesca Giardina on her voyage to America.

Joe N. Gallo's namesake cousin Joseph would return to Alabama in 1938 to marry Frances Casha, a Bisacquinese girl, with the couple returning to Brooklyn where the Brighton-born cousin was residing. Frances Casha's true surname was Cascio, bringing to mind Vito Cascio Ferro, whose secondary surname of Cascio was not a middle name but an additional family name carried through multiple generations. Frances Casha/Cascio's mother was a Longo, another surname that emigrated from Bisacquino with Joe N. Gallo's mother along with the Vetranos. Joe N. Gallo would marry a non-Italian woman in New York, straying from these *compaesani*-centric tendencies within his family.



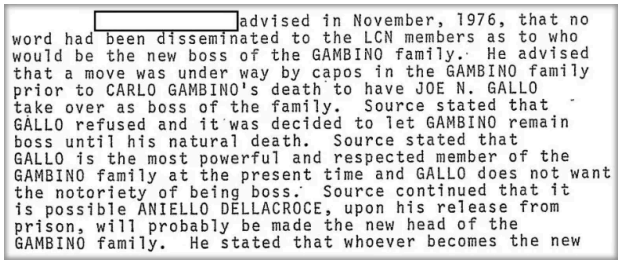
Joe N. Gallo's cousin returned to Alabama to marry a Bisacquinese girl.

I asked Michael DiLeonardo if he was aware of Michele Gallo's involvement in Cosa Nostra and though he was never told explicitly, he felt there was some probability based on what he knew of the family. Other sources stated that Joe N. Gallo proposed his own son Joe C. Gallo for membership in the Gambino Family and though there was apparently some resistance from Family leaders, Joe C. Gallo is today carried as a Gambino member. Perhaps Joe N. Gallo wished to continue a mafia lineage if indeed his father Michele or mother's Giardina relatives were members.

Whether he had relatives involved in the Birmingham Family or not, Joe N. Gallo left Alabama while still a young boy and his rise as a mafioso occurred first in Manhattan and later Queens. Described by an FBI informant as having been inducted into the Gambino Family in 1947, Gallo was a key part of the Joe Riccobono faction that murdered Albert Anastasia in 1957 after Riccobono and his allies learned of Anastasia's plan to murder them. Anastasia was responsible for the murder of Riccobono's distant cousin Frank Scalise earlier that year, adding weight to the Riccobono faction's paranoia. The Anastasia murder followed by the ascent of Carlo Gambino as boss and Joe Riccobono as *consigliere* facilitated Gallo's own entry into the Family hierarchy, serving first as acting *capodecina* for Rosario "Charlie Brush" Dongarra and eventually taking on the duties of acting *consigliere* for Riccobono before assuming the official title.

Joe N. Gallo not only attained the position of *consigliere* under Carlo Gambino but also helped direct Family affairs leading up to and after the death of

Gambino. He was described by an FBI informant in late 1976 as a candidate for official boss, with a faction of Family captains supporting him for the position, but he allegedly refused the promotion due to the notoriety the position would bring. The same source described Joe N. Gallo as "the most powerful and respected member" of the organization and indeed he retained his *consigliere* rank when Paul Castellano became the new *rappresentante*. Gallo also held the acting boss position for a brief time following the murder of Paul Castellano nine years later and though Sammy Gravano stated Gallo was not an active conspirator in the Castellano murder as he was with Anastasia, Gallo did take a passive role and facilitated the ascent of John Gotti as Family boss, presiding over a mock election in which Gotti was voted in, the decision predetermined by backroom politicking.


[redacted] advised in November, 1976, that no word had been disseminated to the LCN members as to who would be the new boss of the GAMBINO family. He advised that a move was under way by capos in the GAMBINO family prior to CARLO GAMBINO's death to have JOE N. GALLO take over as boss of the family. Source stated that GALLO refused and it was decided to let GAMBINO remain boss until his natural death. Source stated that GALLO is the most powerful and respected member of the GAMBINO family at the present time and GALLO does not want the notoriety of being boss. Source continued that it is possible ANIELLO DELLACROCE, upon his release from prison, will probably be made the new head of the GAMBINO family. He stated that whoever becomes the new

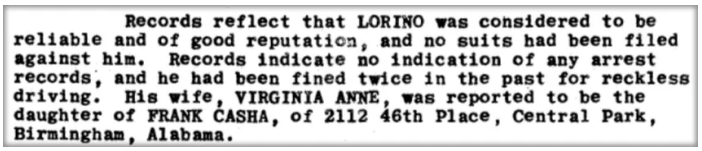
Some Gambino captains wanted Joe N. Gallo to become official boss.

Gallo would remain *consigliere* under John Gotti, as unlike underboss and *capodecina*, *consigliere* is in theory an elected position chosen by the membership and not directly appointed by the boss. The *consigliere* is supposed to keep his position even though other positions can be "taken down" by a new *rappresentante* and indeed Joe N. Gallo kept his title of *consigliere* under Carlo Gambino, Paul Castellano, and even John Gotti for a time. However Gallo ran into conflict with Gotti and the new boss was recorded by the FBI recalling a dispute he had with the senior counselor in which Gallo told Gotti that he lacked the authority to demote a *consigliere*.

Gotti, revealing a shrewd political side, described to Gambino member George Remini how he could circumvent this rule against deposing a *consigliere* by demoting the Family captains, promoting agreeable captains who would vote to take Gallo down from his position, then immediately reinstating the original captains back to their positions after achieving his goal. Whether Gotti followed through with the plan as discussed or Gallo willingly stepped down, he would be replaced a short time later and faced legal issues in the later stages of his life, serving a prison sentence and dying of natural causes in 1995 shortly after his release.

Joe N. Gallo's story centered around New York City and not his native Alabama, but Gallo's roots in the Southern United States may have influenced his role in national mafia politics. Gallo reportedly served as a liaison to the New Orleans Family and he was among those detained at the 1966 La Stella restaurant meeting in which New Orleans leaders met with top New York mafia leaders seeking mediation in connection with an internal dispute.

There is even evidence that arrangements for the New Orleans Family's attendance at the La Stella meeting were coordinated by Gallo. Prior to the meeting, New Orleans boss Carlos Marcello's brother Joseph placed two phone calls to Birmingham, Alabama. One of the people he contacted was Bernard Lorino, a former employee of a Pepsi manufacturing plant who was by this time working as a truck driver. He had no criminal history and his employment history also included a grocery store and insurance firm.

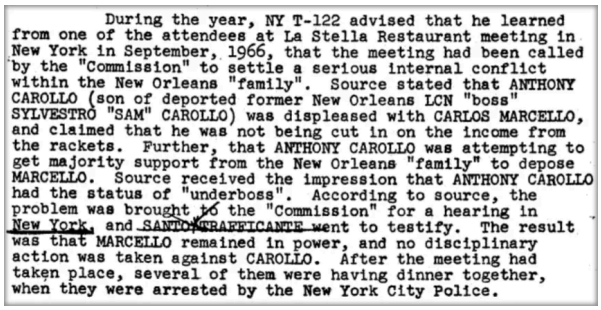

Records reflect that LORINO was considered to be reliable and of good reputation, and no suits had been filed against him. Records indicate no indication of any arrest records, and he had been fined twice in the past for reckless driving. His wife, VIRGINIA ANNE, was reported to be the daughter of FRANK CASHA, of 2112 46th Place, Central Park, Birmingham, Alabama.

Lorino of Birmingham was contacted by the New Orleans Family.

Bernard Lorino's heritage came from Bisacquino, a matter of probability given the high concentration of Bisacquinesi in Birmingham where Lorino lived. Born in 1933, Lorino was a small child at the time the Birmingham Family disbanded but his ties to the Marcellos in New Orleans show familiarity with Cosa Nostra figures in the South. His previous employment at Pepsi brings to mind Michael DiLeonardo's information on the Gambino Rumore brothers' control of a Coca-Cola union. Though Coke is certainly not Pepsi and New York is not Birmingham, the involvement of these Bisacquinesi with major cola companies is a funny coincidence barring some unknown connection. Lorino did have a connection to the Gambino Family, though: he was related to Joe N. Gallo.

The maiden name of Lorino's wife was Casha/Cascio with heritage in Bisacquino and his wife's sister was the woman who married the Brighton-born Joe Gallo of Brooklyn, first cousin of Joe N. Gallo whose father was Michele Gallo's brother Antonino. That the cousin of Joe N. Gallo was a brother-in-law of Bernard Lorino who spoke with Joseph Marcello prior to the La Stella meeting suggests relatives were used to help communicate about the meeting. The FBI's investigation into the phone call was a direct result of the La Stella meeting, though the FBI apparently did not know that Lorino was part of Joe N. Gallo's extended family from the files available and this is only confirmed through my research.

As described in an earlier section, Joe Colombo told FBI informant Greg Scarpa that New Orleans was not subservient to the Commission and therefore did not require national representation as other Families did. New Orleans did consult with the Commission on at least two occasions in the 1960s, however, seeking mediation for internal problems at the 1966 La Stella meeting and consulting with the Commission again in 1968 to inform New York of their plan to induct new members. Colombo told Scarpa the New Orleans group had five remaining members in 1968, including the full Family administration, which is why they intended to bring in new blood.



During the year, NY T-122 advised that he learned from one of the attendees at La Stella Restaurant meeting in New York in September, 1966, that the meeting had been called by the "Commission" to settle a serious internal conflict within the New Orleans "family". Source stated that ANTHONY CAROLLO (son of deported former New Orleans LCN "boss" SYLVESTRO "SAM" CAROLLO) was displeased with CARLOS MARCELLO, and claimed that he was not being cut in on the income from the rackets. Further, that ANTHONY CAROLLO was attempting to get majority support from the New Orleans "family" to depose MARCELLO. Source received the impression that ANTHONY CAROLLO had the status of "underboss". According to source, the problem was brought to the "Commission" for a hearing in New York, and SANTO TRAFFICANTE went to testify. The result was that MARCELLO remained in power, and no disciplinary action was taken against CAROLLO. After the meeting had taken place, several of them were having dinner together, when they were arrested by the New York City Police.

The FBI was told New Orleans sought mediation at La Stella.

New Orleans still surfaced at least twice in Gambino affairs even after Gallo's time. Sammy Gravano described how a New Orleans leader met with the Gambino leadership to disuss a business venture in 1990 and Michael DiLeonardo was aware of contact between the Gambino Family and New Orleans as late as the early 2000s, when George Remini, the same man Gotti spoke with about his problems with Joe N. Gallo, invited DiLeonard to meet with visiting New Orleans members. DiLeonardo did not attend but it is further evidence of a sustained relationship between the Gambinos and remnants of New Orleans, an organization that by that time was around 150-years-old and sustained itself through bare-bones membership.

The use of a Bisacquinese relative in Alabama to communicate with the small New Orleans Family shows Joe N. Gallo maintained ties to the South and these Alabama-based relatives could serve as middlemen to Families in the region even if they themselves were not Cosa Nostra figures. A 1973 New York Magazine article written by Nicholas Pileggi states that Gallo "often" represented the interests of both the New Orleans and Tampa Families. His FBI file also states that he was a respected figure among Families outside of New York City and spent time on the lam in the Midwest after committing an unspecified murder for the organization.

New Yorker sketch of Gallo (front right, white hair) at a mafia meeting.

Though the Gambino Family's relationship with New Orleans was not a formal part of their function on the Commission, numerous sources indicate the Gambino Family did formally represent Tampa on the Commission, supporting Pileggi's information. Tampa mafia historian Scott Deitche agrees, noting the extensive relationships between the two Families. Tampa had particularly close ties to the Gambinos via Joe Arcuri, who served as *messaggero* between the groups. Michael DiLeonardo, who worked closely with Arcuri in the 1990s when the latter served on the Family administration, was personally told by Arcuri about his baptismal ties to the Trafficantes during Arcuri's youth in Tampa. As Family *consigliere*, Joe N. Gallo would have been aware of, if not involved in, these ongoing contacts with Tampa, a Family his organization represented.

Another connection to the American South for Joe N. Gallo comes via his son Joe C. Gallo, who attended college outside of Dallas for a time in the 1960s, long before the younger Gallo became an active participant in the Gambino Family. Connections to the New Orleans and Tampa groups could suggest Joe N. Gallo was acquainted with the small Dallas Family as he was the other Southern groups, however it's highly unlikely any relationship that existed between the Families played a role in his son's schooling there. An FBI informant in Dallas did share his perception that Gallo's one-time boss Albert Anastasia represented the Dallas Family prior to his death, though, and the Dallas organization is known to have maintained a close relationship to New Orleans. The presence of Gallo's son in the area could have provided the father an additional opportunity to network with Families in the South even if the arrangement itself was incidental.

Joe C. Gallo attended school in the South before joining the Gambinos.

Joe N. Gallo's FBI file curiously refers to an alleged Gambino member named Tommy Rizzo who worked under Gallo in Queens. An informant stated that Rizzo was utilized as a liaison for Joe N. Gallo in various matters and was sent to Mexico to handle unknown business on Gallo's behalf, where Rizzo passed away presumably of natural causes. If true, Mexico's proximity to the Southern United States may have factored into Gallo's activity across the border given his known ties to the region.

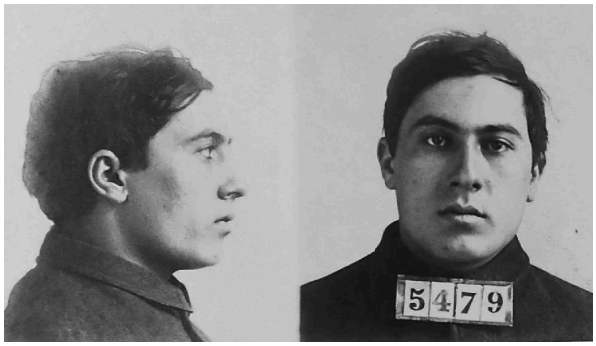
Liaisons and messengers between different national Families were often chosen because of deeper historic relationships, as is evident with Joe Arcuri and his Agrigento *compaesani* in Tampa. Arcuri spent only a short part of his youth in Tampa but nonetheless served as a bridge between the Gambino Family and Tampa for decades. Joe N. Gallo similarly left Birmingham as a child and though no Family existed there in later years it does appear Gallo retained a relationship to the American South much as his Bisacquinese roots may have influenced his relationship to Baltimore. Cosa Nostra's early networks and the traces they left behind greatly informed the relationships between different Families and factions across the United States.

Giuseppe Rametta, Tampa, & Counterfeiting

The mafia in Alabama was not without its own direct ties to Tampa and this relationship again brings Agrigento to the surface, this time showing Birmingham to be not only relevant to social and familial networks but also criminal. Tampa cigar maker Giuseppe Rametta, alternately spelled "Ramatta", was born in 1893 and spent a short time living in Birmingham where in the 1910s he was arrested for counterfeiting with brother-in-law Stefano Vicari, a fellow Tampa resident four years Rametta's elder. Both men were convicted and sentenced to two years in prison.

From prison Rametta was in contact with local Birmingham brothers Vincenzo and Cosimo "Charles" Asaro and both Rametta and his brother-in-law were identified as associates of Salvatore Clemente in connection with the latter's

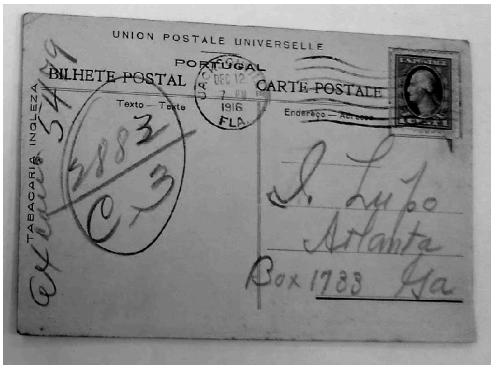
national counterfeiting ring, showing the range of Rametta's contacts and his role in the national network. Clemente was a member of *capo dei capi* Giuseppe Morello's New York Family that would splinter into the Genovese and Lucchese Families. He was also a productive Secret Service informant.



Rametta brings a national dimension to the Birmingham mafia.

The nature of Rametta's background and contacts indicate he was well-connected within Cosa Nostra despite his relative youth. Giuseppe Rametta was from Santo Stefano Quisquina, where Tampa Family boss Ignazio Italiano came from among many other Tampa mafia members, Scott Deitche confirming that even today most Italians in this part of Florida trace themselves back to this town. Italiano was detained at the same 1928 Cleveland meeting that netted Ribera natives Pasquale Lolordo and Phil Bacino of Chicago. Giuseppe Rametta's daughter married a Lazzara, a surname affiliated with the Tampa Family from the same part of Agrigento.

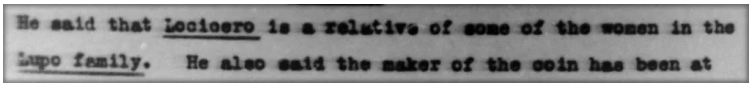
Perhaps most significant is Giuseppe Rametta's contact with a prominent Cosa Nostra leader from New York City: Ignazio Lupo, brother-in-law of Salvatore Clemente's boss Giuseppe Morello. Lupo was the former *rappresentante* of what is today the Gambino Family and Rametta mailed a 1916 postcard to Lupo, who was himself serving time in Atlanta. That the Agrigentino Rametta had direct access to one of the most powerful Cosa Nostra members not only within the United States but truly throughout the world further shows that despite being 22-years-old at the time of sentencing the young Rametta had access to the highest levels of Cosa Nostra.



Rametta communicated with Lupo in 1916. (Credit: Angelo Santino)

Calamonaci natives Vincenzo and Filippo LoCicero, referenced earlier for their prominent membership under Ignazio Lupo's successor Salvatore D'Aquila, may have played a role in the relationship between Giuseppe Rametta and Lupo. Not only did Vincenzo LoCicero's son Felice later reside in Tampa, but a Secret Service report states that the LoCiceros were marital relatives of Ignazio Lupo through women in the Lupo clan. The relation may have come via Ignazio's brother Giovanni Lupo, believed to have briefly served as acting boss in the early 1910s upon his brother's incarceration for counterfeiting.

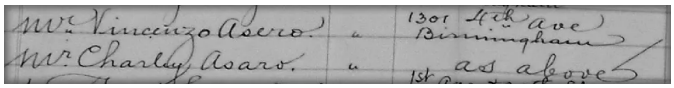
A possible connection between the Lupos and LoCiceros is Giovanni Lupo's wife. Her maiden name LiCalzi is commonly found in the same part of Agrigento the LoCiceros descend from and her mother was a Triolo, the same surname as Phil Bacino's mother in Ribera as well as the mother of the Riberese woman Miceli who accompanied Alabama's Pasquale Amari to America in 1912. The LoCiceros were from Calamonaci, practically a neighborhood of Ribera. The heritage of Lupo's in-laws is unconfirmed and they may have had their own ties to Palermo based on the limited evidence I've found of them in Sicily but the surnames connected to Giovanni Lupo's wife provide a possible lead to go along with the Secret Service informant's belief that the Palermitano Lupos and Agrigentino LoCiceros shared a female relation.


He said that Locicero is a relative of some of the women in the Lupo family. He also said the maker of the coin has been at

Lupo in-laws allegedly had a relation to the Agrigento-born LoCiceros.

Other evidence of Ignazio Lupo's Agrigento and Tampa connections came through his close associates Salvatore Cina and Giuseppe Giglio, natives of Bivona which borders Giuseppe Rametta's hometown of Santo Stefano Quisquina; Bivona was also noted as one of the towns that produced founding members of the DeCavalcante Family's Ribera Club in Elizabeth. Cina and

Giglio spent time in Tampa prior to New York City and remained in contact with Tampa figures while associating with Lupo. Though Ignazio Lupo himself was from Palermo *citta* like most of the Gambino Family's bosses, it's evident that the Agrigento faction of the Gambino Family has roots that may go back to the organization's origins and this element has naturally been connected to the wider Agrigento network throughout its known existence.

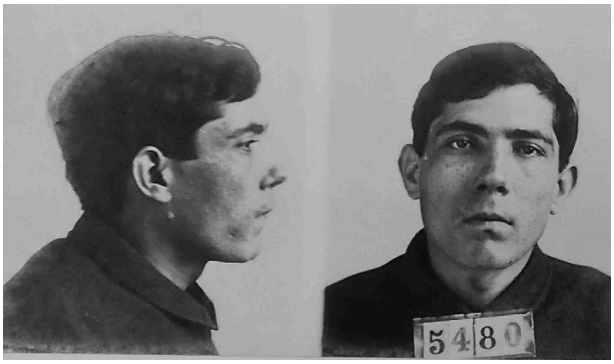


Rametta wrote to Birmingham locals the Asaros from prison.

Returning to Rametta's Birmingham connections, the Asaros he wrote to in Alabama descended from Cianciana, Agrigento, the hometown of the Trafficantes of Tampa that neighbors Rametta's own birthplace of Santo Stefano Quisquina. The Asaros' grandmother was a Diecidue, a name related to the Trafficantes that produced powerful Tampa members. Vincenzo Asaro was born in 1871 and he lived consistently in the Birmingham area until his 1955 death. His brother Cosimo Asaro, born 1875, appears to have been more nomadic, living for a time in New York City, then St. Joseph outside of Kansas City, followed by Birmingham in the 1910s before settling back in Brooklyn. Another brother, Giuseppe, lived in Chicago, while a fourth brother, Antonino, spent time in Alabama, West Virginia, Chicago, and Ohio.

Birmingham's Vincenzo Asaro was another Agrigentino.

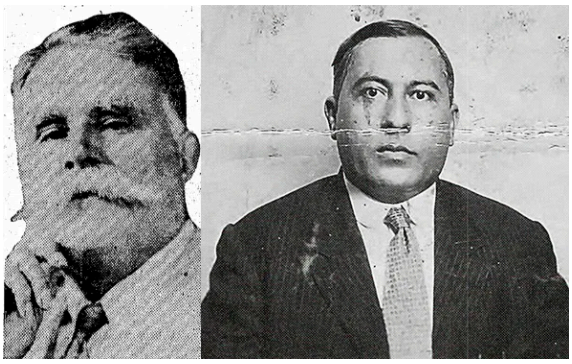
Giuseppe Rametta's wife was from San Biagio Platani, a tiny *comune* just to the east of Cianciana. Brother-in-law and criminal associate Stefano Vicari was the brother of Rametta's wife and his heritage in San Biagio Platani makes for another mafia-affiliated figure who spent time in the Birmingham area with roots in the same part of Agrigento as the Asaros from Cianciana and for that matter the Riberese Caterinicchia-Amari clan, among other Agrigento *compaesani* groups in and around Birmingham.



Vicari was from the same region of Agrigento as brother-in-law Rametta.

The presence of Tampa-based counterfeiters with clearly-identified Cosa Nostra links provides evidence of explicit criminal activity in Birmingham. I make it a point to assert that not all mafiosi, especially in the Sicilian tradition, derived membership through crime and rackets, some members offering value to the organization through professional and personal resources, but neither can Cosa Nostra be separated from illegal activity. Birmingham was apparently part of an extensive counterfeiting network that included figures connected to the Tampa Family in addition to the organizations that would come to be known as the Gambino, Lucchese, and Genovese Families.

Giuseppe Rametta's national connections bridge a gap between Agrigentino mafiosi in Tampa and Birmingham, connecting as well to Ignazio Lupo of New York City whose Family produced the powerful LoCiceros from Calamonaci. Similarly, Lupo's Agrigento associates Salvatore Cina and Giuseppe Giglio as well as other Birmingham figures from Agrigento like the Asaros show patterns of association that derived a great deal of influence from the wider Agrigento network, showing that Western Agrigento supplied other mafia-linked figures in Birmingham in addition to the Ribera colony under Giuseppe Caterinicchia, Tampa apparently playing a vital role in some of these relationships. That Caterinicchia's Riberese *compaesani* Pasquale Lolordo and Phil Bacino attended the same 1928 Cleveland meeting as Tampa *rappresentante* Ignazio Italiano from Rametta's hometown of Santo Stefano Quisquina shows other ongoing association between men from this network.



Tampa boss Stefano Italiano (L) & Rametta (R, circa 1930).

Given the close-knit nature of these Agrigento relationships, it is logical that Caterinicchia had other Agrigentino members and associates in Birmingham who supported him if he was indeed the *rappresentante*. Regardless of Caterinicchia's specific stature, the Riberesi in Alabama fit in well with these mafia affiliates arrested for counterfeiting during the time the Caterinicchia-Amari clan was living in Alabama. The report on Birmingham's Italian history references other Agrigento towns in these Birmingham colonies like Sambuca di Sicilia, Grotte, and Casteltermini, all three villages with a known mafia presence, adding to the likelihood of a significant faction from Agrigento province that informed the local organization's identity and contacts beyond Ribera alone.

Kansas City Connections

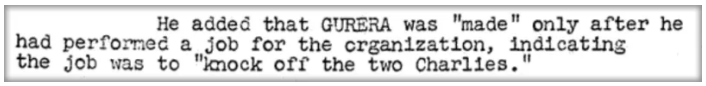
Giuseppe Caterinicchia and Pasquale Amari were related via marriage to the Mangiaracinas and Saccos from Castelvetrano, Trapani, who lived in the same parts of Alabama, including Russellville and Birmingham along with Joe N. Gallo's birthplace in Bessemer. Giuseppe Mangiaracina, whose marital nephew was DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari, is a candidate for membership based on his family's multi-pronged marriages to this Riberese clan and this included his brother Baldassare, Caterinicchia's son-in-law. Giuseppe Mangiaracina's son Benny, who used the Mangina name the family adopted, would go on to live in Kansas City later in life and the possibility of Castelvetranese members in Birmingham is further supported by prominent *compaesani* in the Kansas City Family, some of whom had ties to Alabama.

Born in Kansas City, mafia enforcer Joseph Gurera became a member of the Kansas City Family in the 1950s after his participation in the famed double murder of boss Charles Binaggio and his affiliate Charles Gargotta. Gurera's paternal heritage appears to be from the Bisacquinese Vito Cascio Ferro's one-time home of Sambuca di Sicilia in Agrigento, a town noted for providing Birmingham residents, but his mother was a Mangiaracina from Castelvetrano and Joseph Gurera's maternal uncle, John Mangiaracina, was a Louisiana-born mafioso who became a made member in Kansas City. John's older brother was named Baldassare like the brother of Giuseppe Mangiaracina of Alabama, perhaps indicating common lineage, and their father Calogero, known as "Carl", was an elder Kansas City mafioso.

Carl Mangiaracina (L) & son John (R) were Kansas City mafiosi.

This Kansas City marriage between families from Sambuca and Castelvetrano mirrors the marriages in Russellville, where Ribera, near Sambuca, also cross-pollinated with Castelvetrano. In Joseph Gurera's case the spirit of Western Sicilian mafia comradery that led to interrelation gave way to horrible tension, as Gurera's criminal father, also called Carl, was murdered by his father-in-law Carl Mangiaracina and two brothers-in-law during a domestic dispute with his wife, Joseph's mother. Carl Mangiaracina was involved in underworld activities like his son John and son-in-law Carl Gurera.

Making these hometown connections between Kansas City and Alabama more convincing, Joseph Gurera moved to Birmingham in the mid-1940s where he spent a short time living and working. He soon returned to Kansas City where he was inducted into the local Family during the following decade then transferred membership to the Milwaukee Family for a time in the early 1960s before returning again to Kansas City. He also became an FBI informant prior to his death of natural causes later that decade. What's available in his FBI interviews does not discuss Birmingham nor his deeper lineage.

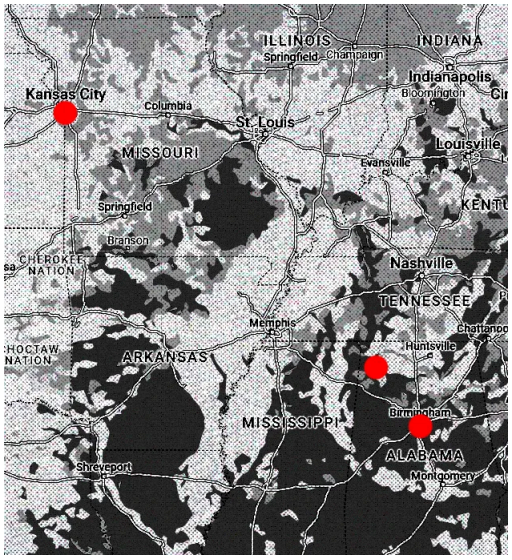

He added that GURERA was "made" only after he had performed a job for the organization, indicating the job was to "knock off the two Charlies."

Members in Kansas City earned induction the hard way.

There is no documented evidence of ongoing contact with Alabama residents following Joe Gurera's residence in Birmingham, but his family connections make it likely Sambuca and/or Castelvetrano factored into his stay, especially given the presence of Mangiaracinas among known mafiosi. The Mangiaracinas connected to the Caterinicchia-Amari clan were living in Birmingham when Joe Gurera stayed there, making awareness of these Castelvetranesi who shared his mother's surname probable even if they didn't factor directly into his stay.

Another direct connection between the Kansas City Family and specifically the Russellville colony comes through Giacomo Crapisi, a native of Castelvetrano like the Mangiaracinas who lived in Russellville shortly after the

turn of the 20th century. After Giacomo's family joined him from Sicily, the Crapisi family moved to Kansas City where son Charles was identified as a drug trafficker and made member of the local Family. Giacomo Crapisi lived in Russellville at the same time Giuseppe Caterinicchia and the Mangiaracinas were establishing themselves in the area.



Kansas City had ties to Russellville & Birmingham.

Along with the confirmed membership of Charles Crapisi's *compaesano* John Mangiaracina in the Kansas City Family, other leading members of the organization like Giuseppe Cusumano and Giuseppe Filardo came from Castelvetrano. Well-known Family boss Nick Civella's Family came from Poggioreale around 17 miles from Castelvetrano and Charles Crapisi's son Joseph, a Family associate, became an FBI informant who described how Cusumano and Filardo formed something of an advisory council (perhaps a formal *consiglio*) that counseled Civella from a bakery they co-owned and held court in.

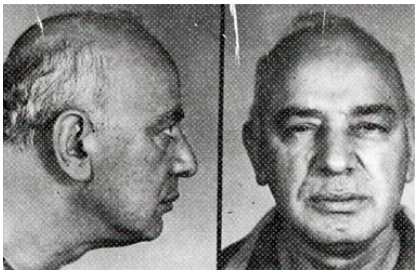
As noted in an earlier section on Alabama figures, Pasquale Amari arrived to New York on the same ship as a Castelvetrano native heading to Kansas City, showing Agrigento and Trapani followed similar immigration patterns further illustrated by Amari's eventual Russellville destination where the Mangiaracinas mingled with the Riberesi. That section also noted how violent Chicago mafioso Pietro Montalbano's mother was a Mangiaracina from Castelvetrano. Montalbano operated in close proximity with Agrigento figures in Chicago and the interrelation between Joseph Gurera's parents from Sambuca and Castelvetrano show how the Kansas City Family itself had influences from both Agrigento and Trapani.

Nicola Gentile from Siculiana described how he moved to Kansas City and even became Family boss for a period, associating closely with an Agrigentino from Burgio named Antonino Ferrantelli who was a member of some significance. Showing that regional affinity played a larger role than provincial borders, other Kansas City leaders from this period came from Chiusa Sclafani across the Palermo border and Chiusa Sclafani produced immigrants to Alabama much as we see with its close neighbor Bisacquino, these *comuni* falling in more with Agrigento migration patterns. Another American Family that shows significant crossover between the borders of Agrigento, Palermo, and Trapani is Pueblo, a mining destination for Sicilian immigrants that included bosses who oversaw an organization that stretched from Trinidad upward to Pueblo and as far as Denver, with indications of a remote outpost in rural Wyoming that included at least one alleged member.

Chiusa Scafani (pictured) fits the patterns of its neighbor Bisacquino.

The Asaros, Giuseppe Rametta's Birmingham associates, provide another connection to Kansas City from an Agrigento background in Cianciana. In addition to Birmingham, Cosimo Asaro lived in St. Joseph which would place him under the Kansas City Family's jurisdiction if indeed he was associated with Cosa Nostra as his contact with Giuseppe Rametta indicates. The various residences of the Asaro brothers reflect further social and familial if not criminal networking that took place between Birmingham, Tampa, Chicago, and Kansas City.

Another significant connection between Kansas City and Alabama is the Civella family. Frank Civella, the elder brother of Kansas City boss Nick Civella, was born in Alabama in 1908 according to a US Census record. The Civellas came from Poggioreale, Trapani, and along with Nick, brother Carl Civella and Carl's son Anthony became high-ranking Kansas City members. The birth of Frank Civella in Alabama places the Civellas in the state when the Family was still active. Their commitment to Cosa Nostra in Missouri could indicate they had early ties to the Birmingham group like their affiliates from Castelvetrano.



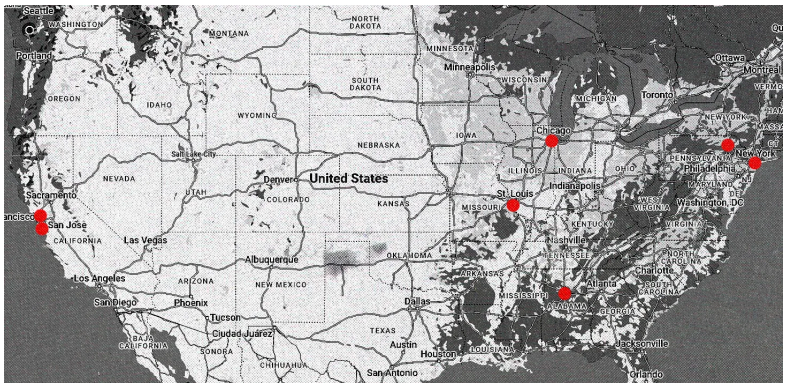
Nick Civella's family spent time in Birmingham before Kansas City.

As we see with Tampa and Alabama, Kansas City and Alabama fell into the same networks and similar patterns played out via chain migration that informed each of these mafia organization's membership and hierarchy. Older generations of members in Kansas City are largely obscure and more connections between these locations may exist than those currently known. As Nicola Gentile's recollections show, mafiosi in early America were not necessarily ready to settle in one location, but rode the waves of their respective networks to different locations while Cosa Nostra was still evolving in this country. In each location they followed the same rules and protocol, belonging to organizations with an identical structure and mindset.

Additional Incidents

There is not enough information on other mafiosi in Alabama to analyze potential members and their national (or international) connections in the same detail as previous sections, but there are scraps showing the Birmingham mafia attracted underworld activity outside of the figures already discussed. This section is a summary of names and events that will hopefully help flesh out gaps in our knowledge of the Birmingham organization and provide opportunities for future research.

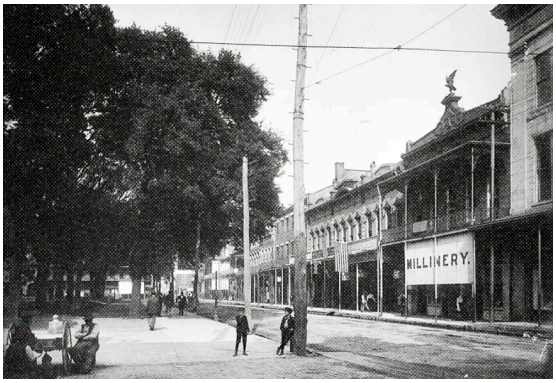
Domenico Giambrone was a significant mafia leader murdered in St. Louis who first arrived to New Orleans in 1903 from Palazzo Adriano. Palazzo Adriano is in Palermo province and neighbors Bisacquino and Chiusa Sclafani. Palazzo Adriano didn't fall into the Corleonese network like other Southern Palermo villages and maintained its own strange network, with Palazzesi appearing as outliers in Families typically associated with other *compaesani* groups like Pittston, the California Bay Area, Chicago, St. Louis, and even the New York Bonanno Family. Colorado also had a colony from Palazzo Adriano that produced early members.



Palazzo Adriano shows up in Birmingham but its network is disparate.

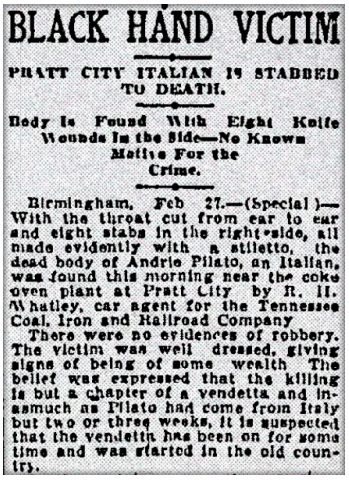
Giambrone arrived to his father, already a resident of Birmingham, and their presence in Alabama matches the prominence of neighboring Bisacquino in Alabama. Domenico Giambrone became a Cosa Nostra leader of some significance in St. Louis, being suspected in more than one murder before having his own life taken in 1934. The presence of Giambrone in Birmingham could indicate other mafia figures from Palazzo Adriano once resided in the area.

In 1904, an Alabama Sicilian named Francesco Cirrincione killed Salvatore Pampinella, the latter described as the "head" and "leader" of the New Palermo colony outside of Mobile, Alabama. Pampinella allegedly owed Sicilian workers back payment for wood they had harvested and couldn't or wouldn't pay the debt, resulting in Cirrincione taking his life. Pampinella was a previous resident of New York City from Baucina and the “New Palermo” colony was intended to attract Sicilians from New York. Conflict erupted in the Alabama colony and Salvatore Pampinella fled for a time before returning just prior to his murder. His killer Francesco Cirrincione was likely an ex-New Yorker from Baucina as well, their hometown at this time producing members of the Morello Family in NYC.



The colony near Mobile may extend mafia activity to Southern Alabama.

Returning north, a man named Andrea Pilato was brutally knifed to death in Birmingham in 1907, a murder believed to have been carried out by the "Black Hand", the catch-all term for mafia-like Italian crime in the early era that sometimes betrays how organized Cosa Nostra was even then. Investigators noted that the Pilato killing was not a robbery, lending itself to the mafia's typical internal justifications for violence. Pilato was from Burgio, Agrigento, a village closely tied to Ribera that shows up repeatedly in this article, further illustrating Alabama's extensive ties to Western Agrigento.



BLACK HAND VICTIM

PRATT CITY ITALIAN IS STABBED TO DEATH.

Body Is Found With Eight Knife Wounds In the Side—No Known Motive For the Crime.

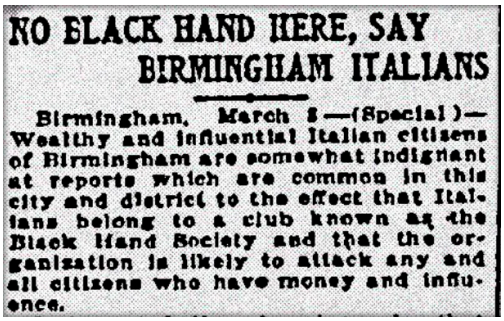
Birmingham, Feb 27.—(Special)—With the throat cut from ear to ear and eight stabs in the right side, all made evidently with a stiletto, the dead body of Andrio Pilato, an Italian, was found this morning near the coke oven plant at Pratt City by R. H. Whatley, car agent for the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company.

There were no evidences of robbery. The victim was well dressed, giving signs of being of some wealth. The belief was expressed that the killing is but a chapter of a vendetta and inasmuch as Pilato had come from Italy but two or three weeks, it is suspected that the vendetta has been on for some time and was started in the old country.

Pilato's murder may have been linked to his hometown of Burgio.

Andrea Pilato was described as well-dressed and he was apparently a figure of significant wealth who had only arrived to the United States two or three weeks before his murder. Investigators believed Pilato's murder was a "vendetta" with origins in Sicily and stated that three murders had taken place over the previous two years in the same Italian colony under "mysterious circumstances". Other national mafia-related killings with transatlantic implications are well-documented in American mafia history and this murder could be yet another example of the international scope evident in early American Cosa Nostra, even as it pertains to violence.

In 1908, Investigators from New Orleans and the East Coast were sent to Birmingham to investigate whether or not a "Black Hand Society" existed in the region. The local Italian colony vehemently denied the existence of a "Black Hand" organization and investigators left without finding proof of mafia activity. It's unknown what this investigation entailed but the high concentration of Western Sicilians in the region would have made the local population unreceptive to such inquiries from outsiders even if the majority of the population was uninvolved with mafia affairs.



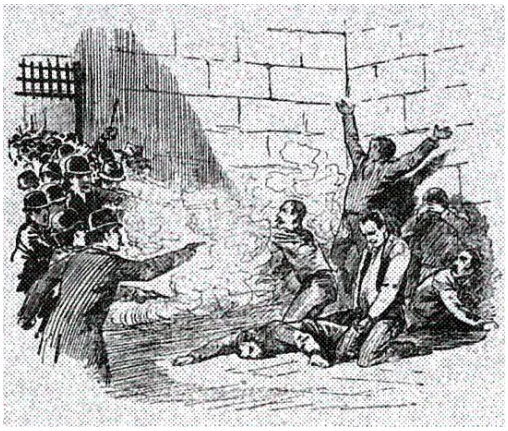
NO BLACK HAND HERE, SAY BIRMINGHAM ITALIANS

Birmingham, March 8.—(Special.)—Wealthy and influential Italian citizens of Birmingham are somewhat indignant at reports which are common in this city and district to the effect that Italians belong to a club known as the Black Hand Society and that the organization is likely to attack any and all citizens who have money and influence.

Birmingham Italians denied the existence of the “Black Hand”.

Local Italian newspaper editor “SR Gurino” attempted to bring a large group of Italian laborers to Birmingham the same year, 1908, and “Gurino” was met with anonymous threats from local non-Italians, including a letter insinuating that the same thing could happen to him that happened to the mafiosi who were publicly lynched in New Orleans in 1891. He was charged with grand larceny in Mississippi a short time later. A year later, “Gurino” and sixty other Italians formed the "Italian National Club".

It's unknown if “Gurino” had ties to the mafia or if he was simply the victim of well-documented anti-Italian prejudice in Birmingham. His given name is not specified beyond his initials but other references to him show the true spelling of his surname was Guarino, most if not all of the Guarinos in Birmingham coming from Bisacquino. He may have been little more than an influential Sicilian whose attempts to increase the local Italian population were met with resistance but his larceny arrest shows a criminal tendency.

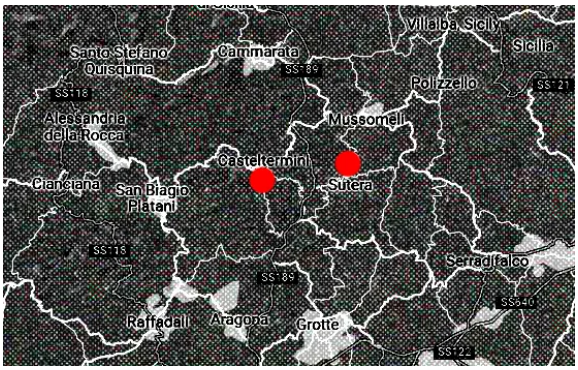


Residents invoked the 1891 New Orleans lynching to scare Italians.

Again in 1908, a Salvatore Scannello was arrested for "highway robbery" and during his arrest a companion named Luigi Tomasino was killed by police. Figures in the local Italian community stated that Tomasino was a member of the mafia and that Scannello was under the mafioso's influence. Tomasino came from Sutera, Caltanissetta, a village noted for supplying a large number of Sicilian immigrants to the Birmingham area. The survivor, Salvatore

Scannello, was from Casteltermini, Agrigento, and one newspaper article refers to young Scannello as a "mafia member", just as another source referred to the deceased Tomasino in similar terms.

We can't assume these sources knew positively that these men were fully-initiated members of Cosa Nostra but our limited sources make these explicit accounts of the two men being "members" of the mafia invaluable. Though the two men descended from different provinces, this is a technicality as Sutera and Casteltermini directly border one another. These towns were also near Santo Stefano Quisquina, Cianciana, and San Biagio Platani, where Tampa counterfeiter Giuseppe Rametta and his associates came from.

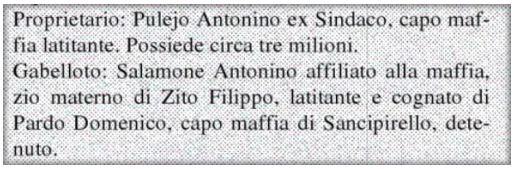


Provincial borders were meaningless to Casteltermini and Sutera.

Future Springfield, Illinois, *rappresentante* Frank Zito arrived to the United States in 1910 from San Giuseppe Jato, joining his brother Salvatore in Kellerman, Alabama. Along with Frank's eventual stature in Springfield, including attendance at the 1957 Apalachin meeting, Zito's brother Joseph became the *consigliere* of the Rockford Family. The Rockford Family and to a lesser extent the Springfield organization operated in the shadow of larger Chicago. In addition to mafiosi from San Giuseppe Jato, immigrants from Ribera lived in Rockford and the dominant *compaesani* faction in Rockford came from Aragona in Eastern Agrigento, operating their own Aragona Club. Frank Zito's Springfield underboss Domenico Campo was from Montevago, directly on the border between Agrigento and Trapani.

The Zitos' involvement in Cosa Nostra did not begin in Illinois nor even the United States but in San Giuseppe Jato, where Prefect Cesare Mori targeted this mafia-controlled municipality in the 1920s and 1930s. These Mori-sponsored investigations revealed two of Frank and Joseph's brothers and an uncle, Antonino Salamone, were mafiosi active with the local Family who managed a rural estate, a duty inseparable from the mafia at that time. The San Giuseppe Jato Family had absolute dominance over their municipality and authorities learned three successive bosses, all cousins, had simultaneously

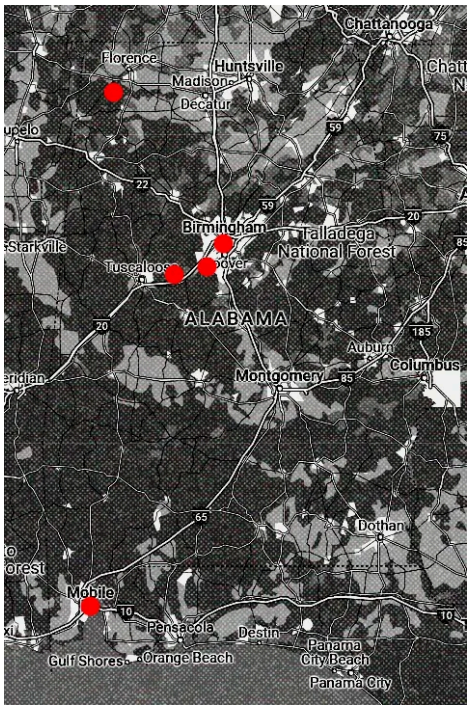
held the position of mayor in the town between the 1910s and 1920s. The Zitos were close associates of Family boss and village mayor Antonino Pulejo, an esteemed lawyer, and there was interrelation with the boss of neighboring San Cipirello, Domenico Pardo.


Proprietario: Pulejo Antonino ex Sindaco, capo maffia latitante. Possiede circa tre milioni.
Gabelloto: Salamone Antonino affiliato alla maffia, zio materno di Zito Filippo, latitante e cognato di Pardo Domenico, capo maffia di Sancipirello, detenuto.

The Zitos and their relatives were tied to the San Giusepe Jato mafia.

A San Giuseppe Jato colony was mentioned in the report on Birmingham's Italian history and the Zitos provide a concrete link between this infamous Sicilian mafia fortress and a Jatino colony in Alabama. The Zitos were fixtures in the Jatino mafia network, which extended between Sicily, the Midwest, New Jersey, New York City, and Central New York State, a sub-network comparable to Ribera in scope that informed multiple national Families. We can now add Alabama to this list and the confirmed involvement of the Zito clan with the San Giuseppe Jato Family in Sicily all but confirms there were mafia ties in Kellerman.

The level of influence Cosa Nostra had in San Giuseppe Jato is extreme even by Western Sicilian standards, making it likely a Jatino colony produced Alabama members. The Zitos' presence in Kellerman, approximately 45 miles from Birmingham, brings to mind the information from the Birmingham Italian report about *compaesani* colonies in the Birmingham area being separated and insular. The areas of Alabama with evidence of possible mafia connections now includes Kellerman, Bessemer, Pratt City, Mobile's New Palermo, and of course remote Russellville where a possible Family boss operated his farm alongside other Western Sicilians.



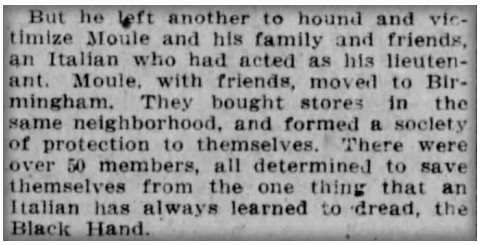
The mafia network was distributed throughout Western Alabama.

Joe N. Gallo's family and their possible relative Francesco Giardina, an apparent multi-murderer in Bisacquino who was again violent in Birmingham as evidenced by the 1903 murder of Salvatore Salerno, shows that a Bisacquinese mafia network did work its way into the area, but there are other examples of Bisacquino natives who were both victims and perpetrators of "Black Hand" activity. Other dominant *compaesani* groups like Campofranco and Casteltermini also surfaced in the 1910s.

In 1912, Alabama police were again investigating the existence of a "Black Hand" organization in Birmingham. Detectives struggled to find substantial evidence of the organization's existence but in early September the store of "Jake Moule" was dynamited and "Moule" revealed that he had spent the previous eighteen months enduring harassment from the "Black Hand" dating back to his earlier residence in Republic, Alabama. "Moule" had posted bond for a "brother Italian" in Republic then offended the man by withdrawing the bond. "Moule" soon began receiving letters from Birmingham demanding large sums of money and when he didn't pay his store was demolished by explosives.

"Jake Moule's" proper name was Giacomo Mule and he was born in Bisacquino. After Mule's store was destroyed, he reportedly banded together with fifty other Italians and the men took turns watching over Mule's store. This proved fruitless, as the store was dynamited yet again. Authorities sought the arrest of an unnamed individual they deemed "the head" of these offenses but the suspect received assistance from "friends" who helped him sneak back to Italy.

A "lieutenant" of the alleged leader continued to prey upon Jake Mule so Mule and other storeowners formed a "society of protection" and moved their businesses into the same neighborhood to further guard themselves. Jake Mule subsequently moved from Republic to Birmingham but around six months later he again began receiving extortion letters and his new Birmingham store was partially demolished by dynamite, making three times Mule had been bombed.

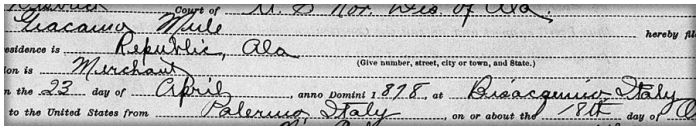


But he left another to hound and victimize Moule and his family and friends, an Italian who had acted as his lieutenant. Moule, with friends, moved to Birmingham. They bought stores in the same neighborhood, and formed a society of protection to themselves. There were over 50 members, all determined to save themselves from the one thing that an Italian has always learned to dread, the Black Hand.

A “lieutenant” hounded Mule after the “Black Hand” leader left the US.

Jake Mule and his friends refused to tell authorities who they suspected of these attacks and did not fully cooperate with law enforcement. Detectives told the *Birmingham Post-Herald* that the neighborhood where Mule's store was located was filled with large numbers of "prowling Italians" at night, many of which had "the butts of revolvers protruding from their hip pockets," but the police were unable to open any leads and no culprits were arrested, the local Police Chief stating he lacked enough officers to properly investigate what was taking place. Mule's ally and Bisacquinese *paesano* Antonino Gagliano was eventually assaulted by the "Black Hand" as a result of his support for Mule but both men maintained their silence.

No suspects were ever publicly named in the "Black Hand" extortion of Jake Mule but the description of omerta-like secrecy and fearsome Italians lurking in the shadows extorting business owners obviously lends itself to organized mafia activity. The victim was from Bisacquino, the largest *compaesani* group in the Birmingham area, and given the extremely high concentration of Sicilians in Birmingham's Italian community it was surely an example of Sicilians preying on fellow Sicilians, perhaps even Bisacquinesi preying on one of their own. The influence of the mafia subculture on even a legitimate townsman like Jake Mule is evident in that he was seemingly uninvolved in mafia activity himself but initially provided bond for an Italian criminal, perhaps a *paesano*, and refused to cooperate with authorities even after a trio of bombings wrecked his stores.

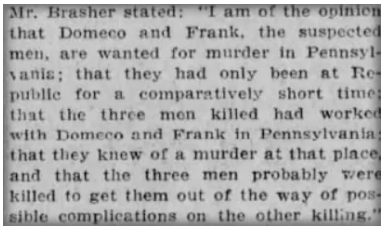


Court of ... Mule ... hereby fi
esidence is Republic, Ala
ion is Merchant (Give number, street, city or town, and State.)
n the 23 day of April, anno Domini 1915 at Bisacquino Italy
to the United States from Palermo Italy on or about the 8th day of

“Black Hand” victim Jake Mule was from Bisacquino.

A few months later, in December 1912, four Italian miners were shot and the "Black Hand" was allegedly behind the attack. The shooting occurred inside the Republic Iron and Steel Company and three of the victims died, these being Tony Schifanella, "Sam Plato", and "Joe Gatano", while another named "Carmelli" was wounded. Schifanella was from Casteltermini in Agrigento though it is difficult to determine the true identities of "Plato" and "Gatano", the latter name likely being Gaetano. The alleged killers were a "John Domeco" and "Frank" who began shooting after entering the building and having a short, angry interaction with the victims. The Deputy Coroner shared his theory with the *Birmingham Post-Herald* that "John Domeco" and "Frank" recently came to Birmingham after fleeing a murder charge in Pennsylvania and had known the victims back there, further stating that the victims may have been killed because of their own knowledge or involvement in the Pennsylvania murder.

It is impossible to further identify "Frank" but "John Domeco" could have been someone named Domico, Domenico, or perhaps D'Amico. There was a Giovanni "John" D'Amico who spelled his name "Damico" and lived in Birmingham by the 1920s but there is no evidence he previously lived in Pennsylvania, this one having lived in New Orleans before Alabama. Damico came from Campofranco, a Caltanissetta village that borders Casteltermini, the Agrigento hometown of victim Schifanella, and this set of towns did produce mafiosi in Birmingham although they also produced a large number of Sicilians in general. If "John Domeco" was Damico and was thus from Caltanissetta it would fit a Pennsylvania connection given both Pittston and Pittsburgh had strong colonies from Caltanissetta but "Domeco's" fugitive status and unconfirmed surname make it difficult to definitively identify him.


Mr. Brasher stated: "I am of the opinion that Domeco and Frank, the suspected men, are wanted for murder in Pennsylvania; that they had only been at Republic for a comparatively short time; that the three men killed had worked with Domeco and Frank in Pennsylvania; that they knew of a murder at that place, and that the three men probably were killed to get them out of the way of possible complications on the other killing."

Authorities suspected a Pennsylvania connection.

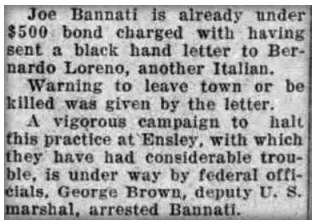
In 1914, a case went to trial involving Jake Tortorici who allegedly sent "Black Hand" extortion letters to an "L.Toggo" of Ensley, Tortorici demanding $100 under threat of physical harm. Though there was a Giuseppe Tortorici from Ribera who was part of the Caterinicchia-Amari circle in Russellville, this man was Gioacchino Tortorici from Bisacquino who like his victim lived in Ensley.

He was in his early twenties and arrived from Sicily two years previous. Both he and "Toggo" spoke no English, the court requiring a translator for its proceedings, but further details about "Toggo" are unavailable, his name possibly being Tocco. Records of Jake Tortorici's time in Alabama and what became of him after this "Black Hand" case are similarly out of reach outside of a 1912 manifest showing he arrived to the Birmingham area from Bisacquino.

"Black Hand" letters continued through the end of the 1910s though in most accounts there is no clear indication they were related to Italians or Sicilians. There were numerous instances where "Black Hand" letters in Alabama were discovered to be pranks, the results of personal grudges between non-Italians, or other non-Italians mimicking the "Black Hand" format to harass or extort other non-Italians. Thus the focus here is not to highlight every vague account of "Black Hand" letters surfacing in Birmingham but primarily on those where evidence shows a more explicit Italian connection and provides a name, be it a perpetrator or victim. The early 1920s fortunately did have some "Black Hand" cases where these details emerged.

1920s Revelations

Bisacquino surfaced again in two 1921 "Black Hand" cases where the victims in both cases were Bisacquinese. In Ensley, a "Joe Bannati" sent a letter to Bernardo Lorino warning him to leave town or be murdered. The suburb of Ensley shows up numerous times in examples of "Black Hand" activity and federal officials had launched a "vigorous campaign" to combat the "considerable trouble" among Italians there. Authorities declared that more “Black Hand” arrests were expected in Ensley in addition to “Bannati”, it being unconfirmed if this took place.


Joe Bannati is already under $500 bond charged with having sent a black hand letter to Bernardo Loreno, another Italian.
Warning to leave town or be killed was given by the letter.
A vigorous campaign to halt this practice at Ensley, with which they have had considerable trouble, is under way by federal officials. George Brown, deputy U. S. marshal, arrested Bannati.

“Black Hand” activity was rampant in Ensley.

The true spelling and identity of "Bannati" is unknown, perhaps it's something like Benanti, but the victim Bernardo Lorino was from Bisacquino and his name suggests he was a relative of the younger Bernard Lorino discussed earlier whose name surfaced in the FBI's investigation into the 1966 La Stella meeting, the younger Lorino being a marital relative of Alabama-born Gambino *consigliere* Joe N. Gallo. What was shared of “Bannati’s” letter to

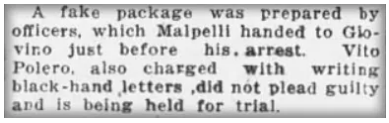
Bernardo Lorino didn't explicitly state it was an extortion demand, only that "Bannati" was bullying Lorino into leaving the area under threat of death.

That same year, a Bisacquinese merchant named Tony Ciulla was extorted for $1000 and his refusal to pay resulted in the bombing of his Ensley home though no suspects surfaced. A perpetrator was named in a more substantial "Black Hand" investigation in early 1922 when Francesco Giovino and his associate Vito Polero were accused of sending extortion letters to John Malpeli. Malpeli cooperated with police and a sting operation was carried out where Giovino and Polero were arrested red-handed just moments after accepting a would-be extortion payment of $500.

Giovino carried out "Black Hand" activities in the 1920s.

Born in 1873, Francesco Giovino was from Campofranco, the Caltanissetta *comune* that borders Agrigento and sits directly next to Sutera and Casteltermini which produced early 1900s Birmingham mafiosi Luigi Tomasino and Salvatore Scannello. The Caltanissetta-Agrigento border was a strong mining region in Sicily so Alabama's own mining opportunities naturally attracted these *compaesani* groups, it being apparent that mafiosi were among the waves of immigration from these towns.

Giovino was a veteran of the Italian army who worked as a stone mason and lived in Ensley followed by Birmingham proper, dying in 1956. He pled guilty in the 1922 "Black Hand" case rather than go to trial and was sentenced to three years of federal time in Atlanta. His associate Vito Polero interestingly was from Catanzaro province in Calabria while their victim Malpeli had mainland roots much further north in the Emilia-Romagna region. Malpeli's willingness to fully cooperate and participate in an undercover operation against Giovino and Polero may be a reflection of his Northern Italian roots in contrast to the Western Sicilian victims previously discussed who barely cooperated, if at all, while being terrorized by the group.

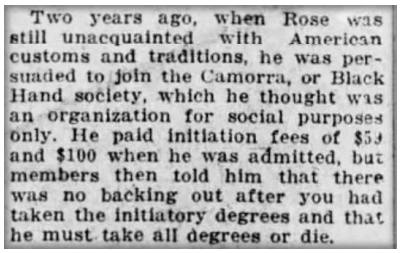

A fake package was prepared by officers, which Malpelli handed to Giovino just before his arrest. Vito Polero, also charged with writing black-hand letters ,did not plead guilty and is being held for trial.

The Giovino case involved different Italian ethnicities.

Frank Giovino being identified in the investigation as one of the "leaders" of the "Black Hand" in the 1920s when he was around the age of fifty places his name among the Family's likely membership if not its upper ranks during the same period Giuseppe Caterinicchia from Ribera likely had a leadership role in the organization. Giovino's identification as a leader is difficult to read into too deeply though given outsiders of the era struggled with the distinction between ranks and had no concept of the organization's structure but given the total absence of information on the Family he should be considered someone of possible importance based on his hometown and age in addition to his identification as a “Black Hand” leader. A man of many faces, Frank Giovino was also a member of the Sons of Italy and his relatives were part of a committee that organized the yearly feast for St. Calogero, patron saint of Campofranco.

Frank Giovino fits the mold of a traditional Sicilian mafioso: he was from a Sicilian region rich in mafia activity, he held a legitimate profession, he was involved in the community and civic activities, yet he was also engaged in ruthless "Black Hand" extortion. If he was a member, he is another figure like Giuseppe Caterinicchia and Pasquale Amari who defies Bill Bonanno's belief that the Family had only octogenarian members who had all died by the late 1930s, Giovino among the better candidates for membership yet he would have been in his 60s when the Family broke up and he then lived until the mid-1950s.

A bigger revelation occurred in 1925 after Corrado "Charlie Rose" Rosana committed suicide while cooperating with authorities. Rosana claimed not only to have received threats from the "Black Hand" but admitted to being a member himself and even provided a list of "members of the organization". County officials planned to "grill" these "members of the society" who had not only carried out verbal threats toward Rosana but also bombed his home. He told authorities that two years previous, around 1923, he was "persuaded to join the Camorra" or "Black Hand society" which he believed was an organization for "social purposes", subsequently paying two "initiation fees" of $50 and $100 upon entry. After he joined, he was told by the other members that there was no "backing out" after taking the "initiatory degrees" and that he must "take all degrees or die."



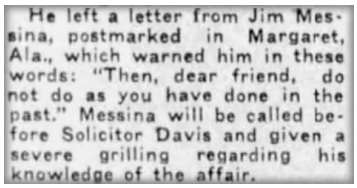
Two years ago, when Rose was still unacquainted with American customs and traditions, he was persuaded to join the Camorra, or Black Hand society, which he thought was an organization for social purposes only. He paid initiation fees of $5 and $100 when he was admitted, but members then told him that there was no backing out after you had taken the initiatory degrees and that he must take all degrees or die.

Rosana claimed he was initiated into the “Camorra” or “Black Hand”.

Charlie Rosana fled to Walker County but the group followed him so he then moved to Margaret in St. Clair County. The organization again found him there and he paid $20 for what he believed was the "final degree" before moving to Ensley. Seeking to cut all ties with the "Black Hand", Rosana finally told "officials of the organization" that he was withdrawing his membership but they responded by telling him "no member of the Black Hand" can leave the group. At work, Rosana began to hear other laborers gossip about his attempt to "quit" the organization and how they'd have to kill him. Rosana felt he should be allowed to remove himself from the group given he had done nothing to harm the organization but he was repeatedly stalked by "member[s] of the society" despite attempts to change his routine, residence, and hangouts.

Violent harassment from the organization led Charlie Rosana to cooperate with law enforcement and list out the organization's members, most of the names unfortunately not included in media coverage of the affair. Newspapers did however print a letter sent to Rosana from a Jim Messina of Margaret who told him, "Then, dear friend, do not do as you have done in the past." Messina was a man named Girolamo Messina who came from Gibellina in Trapani, a *comune* near Castelvetrano, and his wife was from Caltanissetta. Born in 1895, Messina had spent time in Louisana before living in Bessemer then Margaret and lived out the remainder of his life in Alabama, dying in 1947.

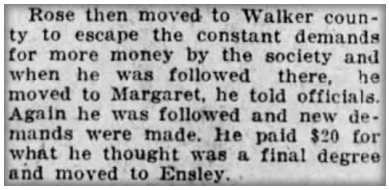
Rosana interestingly was not Western Sicilian himself, coming from Noto in Syracuse province. He told authorities that members of the "Camorra", which he said is international in scope and headquartered in Italy, referred to one another as "Brother Mayflier" though he said Alabama-based members of the local group also called each other "dear friend", the phrase Messina used to address Rosana in his letter. The use of "Mayflier" is esoteric but *fratello* (“brother”) and *amico* (“friend”) were commonly used by the mafia though these terms are universally found in fraternal societies of all kinds and on their own don’t confirm the nature of this specific organization beyond it being an Italian underworld group.


He left a letter from Jim Messina, postmarked in Margaret, Ala., which warned him in these words: "Then, dear friend, do not do as you have done in the past." Messina will be called before Solicitor Davis and given a severe grilling regarding his knowledge of the affair.

Jim Messina was an apparent member in Margaret.

Margaret resident Jim Messina's Western Sicilian background fits in well with what is presumed about the Birmingham Family, Gibellina sitting on the eastern edge of Trapani where it borders Agrigento and Palermo provinces, this area producing most of Birmingham's Sicilian population and thus its local mafia. That Rosana on the other hand came from Syracuse and claimed membership in the group raises questions, as does his description of the organization as the "Camorra", a term reserved for mainland iterations of the Italian underworld phenomenon. Much like "Black Hand", however, "Camorra" was once used interchangably with "mafia" by the early press and sometimes law enforcement, the Camorra being infamous in its day and the distinctions between these organizational terms being of little concern at the time given they described activities that were on the surface identical to outsiders. Did Rosana use the term "Camorra" himself to describe this group, or was this the term law enforcement or the media used to relate his admissions to the public?

Charlie Rosana did discuss "degrees" of membership each of which required monetary tribute, bringing to mind the freemason-like practices and financial collectivism of the Camorra. The early Sicilian mafia, including in the United States, did not have "degrees" of membership nor did it require initiation fees. Mafia initiation generally followed the passing of a "test", often murder, and once someone was a member, they were in theory a member equal to all others even though some members held higher "representational" ranks. Though mafia members were expected to provide resources to the organization, money being the ultimate resource, members advancing in the organization were not asked to pay a fee, let alone a series of fees that faciliated entry into new “degrees”. The Camorra on the other hand did have different "societies" each of which required its own initiation and ceremony, mirroring a "degree" system, and they were known to demand fees from members. It certainly sounds like Rosana was describing a "Camorra" group in this regard.


Rose then moved to Walker county to escape the constant demands for more money by the society and when he was followed there, he moved to Margaret, he told officials. Again he was followed and new demands were made. He paid $20 for what he thought was a final degree and moved to Ensley.

Rosana said the organization had “degrees”.

The existence of the Camorra in Birmingham though would be a complete surprise. The area was once 90% Sicilian and while there were mainlanders in the area I have yet to find a significant Neapolitan or Calabrian population. One possible lead is Francesco Giovino's "Black Hand" partner Vito Polero, arrested in 1922. Polero was from San Vito in Catanzaro and shows that a Sicilian mafioso in Alabama was not against working with a Calabrian, though we can't infer anything about the relationship beyond their mutual involvement in underworld extortion let alone whether an analogous organization of mainlanders existed alongside the Birmingham Family. It seems unlikely that the Camorra would have a foothold in the overwhelmingly Sicilian communities found in Alabama though to be fair many followers of this subject would have once said the same about a Birmingham branch of Cosa Nostra.

What confuses Charlie Rosana's account of the "Camorra" further is that we only know the names of two alleged members and they're both Sicilian: Rosana himself and Girolamo "Jim" Messina of Margaret. The Camorra was reportedly not opposed to recruiting otherwise unaffiliated Sicilians and Eastern Sicilians in particular have gravitated toward mainland organizations even in Sicily itself, so Rosana as a Camorrista would be less surprising than Gibellina native Jim Messina. The province of Trapani has historically produced fewer mafia Families than the saturated provinces of Palermo and Agrigento but Gibellina is one of the Trapani villages that has consistently maintained an organization while also producing important mafiosi in cities like Kansas City and Newark. Why would a Gibellinese in Birmingham, which had its own mafia Family, have affiliation with the Camorra, if indeed that is what Rosana was describing?

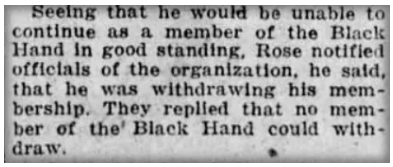
Jim Messina’s background suggests mafia, not Camorra.

The early 20th Century "Society of the Banana" case in Ohio and Pennsylvania focused on the Lima clan from Trabia and some of their confederates from other Palermo villages. They were engaged in widespread "Black Hand"

activity in collaboration with mainlanders but the investigation found evidence suggesting cross-pollination between different Italian secret societies including a list of distinctly Camorra-like rules found in leader Salvatore Lima's possession. The Limas produced members and leaders of mafia Families in Pittsburgh, Johnstown, San Francisco, and San Jose, with descendant Tony Lima, an FBI informant and one-time San Francisco boss, telling the FBI that at least one of the older Limas had been made in Trabia. We can't say exactly what was going on in the "Banana" case but perhaps something similar was afoot in Birmingham although a key difference is Ohio and Pennsylvania had large populations of Southern Italian mainlanders with their own organizations whereas there is nothing available to suggest anything like that existed in Birmingham.

It's of course possible that Charlie Rosana's story was distorted, that he himself fabricated elements or otherwise lied, or important context was lost, but what's available shows that he named names, described the group in some detail, and after betraying his "dear friends" he was terrified enough to commit suicide. In Rosana's telling he makes himself out to be little more than an extortion victim who was tricked into joining an innocent fraternal society only to find out it was a violent pyramid scheme. If this is true, the organization he joined certainly doesn't reflect the traditional mafia, where members are not tricked into becoming members then extorted, rather they are reborn into a higher class and given a new range of responsibilities and opportunities. Joining the Sicilian mafia was regarded as an honor and inductees generally knew what to expect from membership in the group.

Rosana's repeated references to the group prohibiting members from withdrawing membership does bring to mind the mafia's well-known rule about members taking an oath for life and only leaving "feet first" but this rule is not exclusive to the Sicilian branch of Italian underworld groups. Along with the possibility that Rosana deliberately framed the story to make himself out to be more of a hapless victim than a willing mafioso, thus diminishing the elements we'd otherwise link to the Sicilian mafia, it's also possible that he was not made a member of a true underworld organization and that his multi-step "initiation" into what he believed was a fraternal society was itself simply an extortion scheme the mafia operated on a meta-level alongside their Family. The full truth of the situation is lost to us but whatever the case, Charlie Rosana provided substantial leads for both contemporary investigators and later researchers.

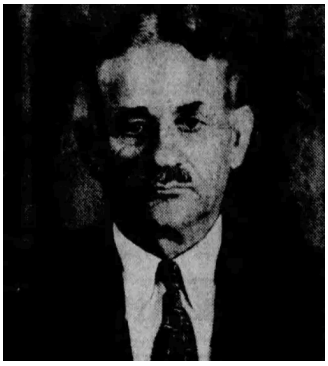

Seeing that he would be unable to continue as a member of the Black Hand in good standing, Rose notified officials of the organization, he said, that he was withdrawing his membership. They replied that no member of the Black Hand could withdraw.

Rosana was told he couldn't leave the organization.

Though their names were not included, authorities stated that Rosana's list of members included six in Birmingham itself, one in East Lake, one in Marvel, another in Republic, two in Watson, three in Margaret, and two in Ensley, for a total of sixteen members. Presumably Jim Messina was one of the members in Margaret and the named areas like Ensley, East Lake, and Republic do show signs of Sicilian mafiosi in other accounts of "Black Hand" activity. Removing the Camorra angle and assuming this was the Birmingham Family, it would fit our general expectations of the Family's size based on Bill Bonanno's account of a dwindling Family in the 1930s with few remaining members. However, Bonanno gives the impression that the Birmingham Family had exclusive recruitment practices that left only elderly members by the mid-1930s.

I've questioned the specifics of Bonanno's story throughout this article based on some of the names that have surfaced in Birmingham's mafia history but I also don't doubt that Bill's account is basically true in that a small Alabama Family stopped inducting members and chose to disband. If Charlie Rosana was a member of the mafia and not the Camorra, it would indicate the Family was somewhat loose in their recruitment practices in the 1920s, inducting an Eastern Sicilian from Syracuse who flipped on them two years later. I don't necessarily believe that is the whole story, though, and lacking further detail from Rosana it is difficult to form any kind of conclusion from his account.

During the Rosana case, it was noted that law enforcement had been operating under an assumption that the "Black Hand" disbanded after Francesco Giovino was incarcerated in 1922 and were thus surprised to find them active again in 1925. Giovino served three years in Atlanta and was released a short time before Charlie Rosana cooperated in 1925. Giovino remained a resident of Birmingham for the remainder of his life, having first arrived in 1907 although his wife and children remained in his hometown of Campofranco and never followed him to the United States.

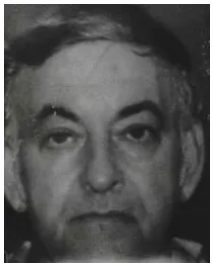


Frank Giovino's incarceration did not stop the so-called "Black Hand".

Giovino did have a brother and other relatives in Birmingham and a year after Frank's release from prison his 24-year-old nephew Charles Giovino was identified as the head of a local jewelry theft ring in which the younger Giovino supervised a highly-organized gang of black teenagers who committed the thefts while Charles fenced the stolen goods. Uncle Frank worked with a Calabrian in 1922 while nephew Charles Giovino worked with young black men in 1926, showing that Sicilian crime in 1920s Birmingham did not limit itself to Sicilian or even Italian co-conspirators. These episodes, along with the Noto-born Rosana's alleged induction into the "Black Hand", could suggest that Birmingham was mirroring the Americanization process seen in Families around the country but unlike their national peers it was of no long-term consequence given the organization disbanded in the 1930s. These 1920s accounts give us a slight glimpse into the organization when it was already fading from view.

Remnants?

A later Birmingham underworld figure was Sammy Cantavespre, who was born in 1928 and traced his heritage to Bisacquino. Cantavespre ran strip clubs in Birmingham and Florida. He looked and acted the part of a "wiseguy", being charged at one point in the 1982 bombing of a nightclub, though there is no information linking him to "official" mafia activity and he passed away in 1988. His mother however was a Longo, a Bisacquinese surname closely linked to the Gallos of the Gambino Family going back to Bisacquino and their early residence in Alabama. Given the likelihood that a number of unidentified Bisacquinese men were early members of the Birmingham Family, it's possible Sammy Cantavespre was a descendant of one of them though that is entirely speculative and his mafia-like reputation may have been incidental.



Cantavespre had Bisacquinese heritage.

A more prominent name in later Birmingham was another Sam, this one Fiorella who was just a few years older than Cantavespre and can be peripherally linked to older figures. A major bookmaker and numbers operator who ran gambling houses and accumulated related charges spanning decades, Fiorella was a confirmed marital relative of the Caterinicchia-Amari-Mangiaracina clan through the Musso name. Sam Fiorella's sister Anita married Louis Musso, whose sister Lena in turn married John Mangina, the son of Russellville farmer Giuseppe "Joe Mangina" Mangiaracina and his wife Giuseppa Amari. This union between natives of Castelvetrano and Ribera was discussed in-depth earlier, as in addition to being DeCavalcante boss Phil Amari's paternal aunt, Giuseppa Amari Mangiaracina and her husband were in-laws of Pasquale Amari through the marriage of their son Vincent to Pasquale's daughter. The Fiorellas themselves traced their heritage to Montemaggiore in Palermo province.

Fiorella had a marital relation to the Caterinicchia-Amari clan.

Though the Birmingham Family disbanded when both Cantavespre and Fiorella were still boys, they were the local equivalent of "wiseguys" who maintained their own small-scale underworld in Alabama. That Cantavespre was Bisacquinese and Fiorella was a relative of the Caterinicchia-Amari-Mangiaracina clan could tell us these men were artifacts of the early Family's influence even though there was no formal organization to affiliate with by their time. That these two men can be connected to older *paesani* groups from Bisacquino, Ribera, and Castelvetrano might be a coincidence or a matter of probability based on the immigrant groups who arrived to

Birmingham but it does lend itself to the belief that these locations served as a partial foundation of the Birmingham Family.

Though the instances were rare, some mafiosi from other parts of the United States did surface in Alabama on occasion in later years. In 1948, future Chicago member Frank Zizzo was arrested for a $68,000 jewel robbery in Birmingham. His accomplices were fellow associates of the Chicago Family though it's unknown what brought these men specifically to Alabama beyond the crime itself. Zizzo was sentenced to probation and there is no evidence of ongoing ties to the Birmingham area on his part, Zizzo later representing his Family in Indiana and neighboring areas of Illinois. The Zizzos were from Marsala in Trapani, a coastal city not far from Castelvetrano and Gibellina, and Frank's son Anthony later became a Chicago member who disappeared in 2006.

Frank Zizzo was arrested in Birmingham.

Powerful Bonanno member Antonino Riela of New Jersey was related via marriage to a family of Simonettis from his hometown of San Giuseppe Jato who lived in Birmingham. Joseph Simonetti, who married Riela's niece, later engaged in a 1950s heist in which he tried transporting stolen diamonds from Las Vegas to Newark only to be arrested in the process. Riela, who lived in Newark at the time, maintained contact with the Simonettis in Alabama and Riela was additionally a longtime friend of the Zito brothers of Rockford and Springfield who spent time in Kellerman before heading to Illinois. Simonetti's ongoing contact with Riela and involvement in illegal activity could suggest he was a remnant of Birmingham's mafia subculture and gives us added reason to suspect San Giuseppe Jato once produced Alabama members.

An Alabama resident informed me that the Brunos of Birmingham, specifically a man named Vincenzo Bruno, were natives of Bisacquino who arrived in 1909. Vincenzo's son Joseph started a successful supermarket chain called Bruno's. Though the store declared bankruptcy and is now defunct, it is evident that Bisacquinese immigrants had an impact on all aspects of life in the Birmingham Italian community, including legitimate commerce. Many Cosa Nostra members owned grocery stores and were involved in wholesaling, and

though these specific Brunos can't be identified as underworld figures they were related through marriage to a set of brothers referenced earlier.

Entrepreneur Sam Bruno had a marital tie to mafia-linked figures.

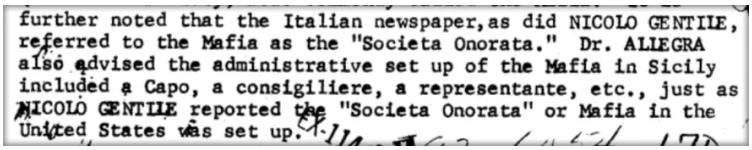
The Giuseppe Rametta-connected Vincenzo Asaro of Birmingham was the father-in-law of Saverio "Sam" Bruno, the nephew of Vincenzo Bruno. Sam Bruno's cousin Joseph started the Bruno's grocery chain and Sam was himself a local entrepreneur. That Vincenzo Asaro descended from Cianciana in Agrigento and his daughter married the son of a Bisacquinese immigrant shows the affinity between Agrigento and Bisacquino described by Michael DiLeonardo earlier in this article though the union could have been equally the result of remaining *Sicilianismo* that brought these younger generations together.

The Structure of Birmingham's Mafia

I will make no attempt to identify definitive Cosa Nostra ranks and membership lists using the limited available information on Alabama's mafia organization. I hesitate to theorize even about Giuseppe Caterinicchia's position even though there are strong indications he held stature within the mafia hierarchy. However, neither will I trivialize what existed in Alabama by claiming no such formal hierarchies existed. Though some may feel these designations are arbitrary or de facto in the pre-1931 American mafia and it's true there are only a small minority of researchers who care enough to make these distinctions, if we want to accurately document this shadow government we have to approach its formal structure with the same precision the members themselves do and did.

Investigations into the *Fratellanza* organizations in Palermo and Agrigento revealed those early Sicilian groups to have structure and protocol near-identical to what we know today, even identifying the rank of *capo di decina*, the same position later shortened to *capodecina* that was further corrupted phonetically into "caporegime" in the United States. The Sangiorgi Report at the turn of the century also revealed that ranks like *caporione* (literally "district boss", akin to Family boss), *sottocapo* (underboss), and *sostituto* (substitute) existed in Palermo at that time, with Nicola Gentile using *capo* and *sostituto* to refer to the boss and acting boss positions in the United States.

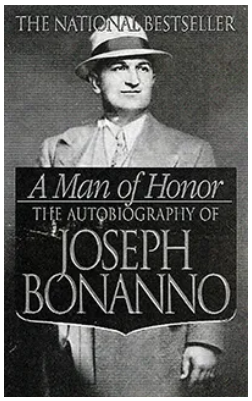
Gentile also used both *capodecina* and *capo di decina* in a manner identical to what the earlier *Fratellanza* investigations discovered.


further noted that the Italian newspaper, as did NICOLO GENTILE, referred to the Mafia as the "Societa Onorata." Dr. ALLEGRA also advised the administrative set up of the Mafia in Sicily included a Capo, a consigiliere, a representante, etc., just as NICOLO GENTILE reported the "Societa Onorata" or Mafia in the United States was set up.

There was clear continuity between the Sicilian and American mafia.

Castelvetrano native Dr. Melchiorre Allegra, made into the Pagliarelli Family of Palermo by Ignazio Lupo's in-laws the Motisis circa World War I, also described the positions of *capo / rappresentante*, *consigliere*, and *capo della decina* along with a description of the *sostituto* or acting boss position. FBI wiretaps and cooperation from informants around the country in the 1960s showed that numerous American bosses and made members still used terminology consistent with 19th century Sicily, including *capo* for boss (not captain, as the term has come to mean in modern America) and its synonym *rappresentante*, both of these terms used by Nicola Gentile to describe the position in America between his induction into the *Societa Onorata* in Philadelphia in 1906 through his deportation as a Gambino member in the late 1930s.

Interestingly the term that fluctuates the most over time is the name of the umbrella organization itself, be it mafia, Cosa Nostra, *Societa Onorata*, or the similar *Fratuzzi* and *Fratellanza*, among others. In America it's taken on English euphemisms like "the outfit" and other casual adaptations. Though it appeared primarily in Sicily, *Fratellanza* was used even in America by early Secret Service informants, showing continuity between the American mafia of the early 20th century and the Sicilian groups discovered in the 1870s and 1880s. Joe Bonanno clarifies in his autobiography that the umbrella organization has no true name, even rejecting "Cosa Nostra", preferring to refer to the mafia as his "tradition". Indeed it was a tradition for men from Sicilian mafia lineages like the Castellammarese Bonanno and his son Bill who inherited the tradition from their own elders.



Though highly organized, Bonanno states Cosa Nostra was nameless.

Applying mafia formalities to Alabama and Birmingham is impossible but we should still view the organization, which existed contemporaneously to these other sources, through this framework rather than taking on the antiquated outsider view that these were “Black Hand gangs” or that a disorganized collection of Italian criminals were waiting for men like Salvatore Maranzano and Charlie Luciano to organize them into “La Cosa Nostra”. Early sources show the organization to have used different terms for the mafia but the organization was continuous dating back to 19th century Sicily and it was strikingly consistent in the way it organized and propagated itself despite massive cultural changes that took place in America.

Bill Bonanno stated that Birmingham, Alabama, had a formally recognized Cosa Nostra Family, which implies that all of the known rules applied there. Different organizations utilize slightly different set-ups, some having more captains than others or even no captains at all, and some like Stefano Magaddino chose not to utilize positions like *consigliere*, though Magaddino was well-aware of the position and explained to the benefit of the FBI (and us) why he chose not to allow the election of a *consigliere* in his Family. Just as Families require formal recognition to form and then proceed to elect positions like *rappresentante* and *consigliere*, the Alabama group similarly voted to disband, but they did so by contacting the Commission and received formal representation from a national leader in the absence of their own defunct organization. Bill Bonanno’s account, albeit limited, shows that Alabama members were committed to the rules and formalities of his father’s “tradition” even when choosing to withdraw from active participation. That is not the action of a simple extortion “gang” but rather the shadow government these men transplanted from Western Sicily.

The mafia in Alabama was not simply Sicilian, it was informed by intricate networks of relationships formed in specific Western Sicilian strongholds connecting Agrigento to the provinces of Trapani, Palermo, and Caltanissetta.

Just from the few names and scraps of information we have available, Alabama can be linked to the DeCavalcante, Gambino, Tampa, Kansas City, Chicago, and Boston Families. It can also be linked to Nicola Gentile, who was in turn connected to virtually every node in the international network. Bill Bonanno was right: Cosa Nostra had a presence in Birmingham, Alabama.

Post-Script: Reconciling with Bill Bonanno

Bill Bonanno's reference to Birmingham attracting immigrants from Palermo appears to be true to some extent in that Palermo province in addition to the other Western Sicilian provinces like Agrigento, Caltanissetta, and Trapani provided mafia figures in the area but I have yet to see evidence that Palermo *citta* had an influence in Birmingham. Urban Palermo also doesn't fit the labor and farming trades taken up by Sicilian immigrants in Alabama.

The Sicilian villages that played a large role in Alabama inside and outside of Cosa Nostra are rural and the mafia organizations in those locations were regarded as "peasants" by metropolitan Palermitani according to sources like San Giuseppe Jato Family *pentito* Giovanni Brusca, a *compaesano* of the Zitos who spent time in Kellerman. Alabama appears to have been a "peasant" mafia, both because it existed in labor communities in and around Birmingham but also because its members came from rural villages. What they may have lacked in refinement, they made up for through avid networking and adherence to their own secretive systems.

Bonanno's belief that boss Tom Gagliano of the Lucchese Family was tasked with representing what remained of Birmingham on behalf of the Commission is curious. Gagliano and much of the Lucchese Family descended from Corleone and though Corleone is near many of the locations discussed here, it doesn't appear to have had a significant immigrant colony in the area. Corleone is not mentioned in the report on Birmingham's historic Sicilians despite other nearby villages being mentioned. Perhaps Gagliano was chosen randomly or maybe Bill Bonanno was mistaken, though it's guaranteed there are connections we are unaware of that could have played a role in this arrangement if true.

When a Family is disbanded, a Cosa Nostra axiom requires that the remaining members be assigned to another Family even if they are inactive. Cosa Nostra is at its core a system of representation and these men would need to be represented. When the Newark Family disbanded during the same period, its members were assigned to various New York Families. Of course, Newark is in close proximity to NYC and there was a high level of mafia activity in the area, New Jersey's extensive mafia membership wanting to remain active in crime,

business, and social affairs within the mafia network. Alabama was very different from New Jersey, obviously.

This process even played out in Sicily, Dr. Melchiorre Allegra stating that the Castelvetrano Family dissolved itself temporarily due to pressure from Mussolini's Fascist government. Allegra didn't say who this Family was assigned to, if they were in fact assigned to another group during this period of chaos and intense prosecution, but Tommaso Buscetta referred to Palermo Families temporarily disbanding and receiving representation from other nearby groups. We know that formal represenation is necessary in Sicily even when a Family doesn't exist in an area, though, as Antonino Calderone described how members inducted in his hometown of Catania were first brought into a Palermo Family a significant distance from Catania and only later was Catania allowed formal recognition as an autonomous Family.

The only other known example we have of an American Family willingly voting to disband — Newark was allegedly forced to do so by the Commission — is the Madison Family of Wisconsin. Milwaukee member and FBI informant Augie Maniaci was informed of this decision in 1973 by a Rockford member and learned that two members of the long-quiet Madison Family wished to remain active in mafia affairs and were thus assigned to Milwaukee. The affiliation of the other members was not reported to Maniaci though protocol would have required they belong to an organization somewhere

Perhaps the other Madison members were assigned to Chicago given many of them first lived there and once belonged to that Family. Chicago also represented Madison on the Commission during their time as a formal organization, increasing the possibility of this arrangement. There was once also a separate Family in Chicago Heights whose leadership was killed and the organization was merged with Chicago, forming a *decina* there, though no inside sources elaborated on whether the organization in Chicago Heights voted to disband or, like Newark, were forced to do so. There was precedent for Chicago absorbing former members of nearby groups at least, though it's easier to understand when it's an organization in the same region that represents what's left of a defunct one.

A similar process plays out even inside of Cosa Nostra Families. Philadelphia boss Angelo Bruno was recorded by the FBI discussing an elderly member of his Family who retired to the Jersey Shore. This man was failing to meet the Family's requirement that a member contact his *capodecina* at least once a month to check in, as this old timer was content to retire from Cosa Nostra in his old age. However, Bruno explained that even if the man didn't want representation, he had non-member relatives who might need the services of

the organization in the future and therefore he should follow protocol by touching base with his captain in order to maintain his standing even though it was a mere formality. Stefano Magaddino discussed a similar situation on his own FBI bug, referring to an unnamed elderly member of an unspecified Family whose *capodecina* had died. This senior member never reported in to be reassigned to a new *capodecina* and Magaddino was incredulous. To Magaddino this breach in time-honored protocol was outlandish and he struggled to understand why the member failed to follow mafia custom.

If Bill Bonanno's account is true, the remaining Alabama membership may have officially belonged to the Lucchese Family. This is unintuitive to outsiders, where the idea of elderly Alabama members belonging to a New York City organization makes little sense when viewing these groups through the lens of a "Crime Family", but this is the same umbrella organization that allowed the Bonanno Family to maintain crews on the West Coast and in Montreal. The Bonannos did not micro-manage these satellite crews but rather represented them. This article also made reference to the Gambino Family's Baltimore crew, itself barely involved in crime by the 1960s yet they were still represented within the network.

The nature of these arrangements becomes clear when Cosa Nostra is viewed as a system of representation. This doesn't discount its inherent criminality, it simply expands our understanding and shows it to be more than a glorified gang. Cosa Nostra is an insular society with its own system of government, this terminology used by the members themselves. Gambino turncoat Sammy Gravano famously invoked this perspective when he decided to cooperate and told the FBI, "I want to switch governments."

Bill Bonanno's description of Birmingham is invaluable but should be taken loosely. He was told of their existence generations after they disbanded and even if his source had firsthand knowledge, be it his father or someone else, it was an ancient event in an obscure location long forgotten by most mafia members. Bill's view is helpful but there are already indications his information was at least partially inaccurate.

Bill Bonanno said that the youngest member of the Birmingham Family was 80-years-old at the time they requested dissolution in the mid-1930s and in turn the youngest "prospect for membership" was 74. It's extremely unlikely that this highly-specific information would be known to Bill Bonanno or even accurately remembered by older members. It would also mean the "youngest" member he referred to was born circa 1855, a year inconsistent with the candidates discussed in this article. He also states that by 1938 no members

remained alive in Birmingham, another detail inconsistent with my discoveries.

Even if some of the Alabama mafia figures discussed here were not members, and I'm sure not all of them were, there is strong evidence that Giuseppe Caterinicchia was at least a member and possibly a Family *rappresentante* given his ties to important national figures like Boston boss Gaspare Messina and *Gran Consiglio* member Nicola Gentile. Giuseppe Caterinicchia was born in 1861 and died in 1958, a year after the doomed Apalachin meeting, making Caterinicchia the strongest refutation of Bill Bonanno's claim. Caterinicchia's brother-in-law Pasquale Amari was born in 1865 and died himself in 1944, staying in Alabama unlike Caterinicchia who died in New Jersey late in life. Amari committed a mafia-like murder in Ribera and was related at least through marriage to DeCavalcante and Chicago mafiosi, but if Amari was not a member, the question is who did they induct or allow to transfer into the Alabama Family if not someone like him?

Other mafia-linked individuals who remained in Birmingham like Vincenzo Asaro from Cianciana and Francesco Giovino from Campofranco raise similar questions, both dying in Birmingham in 1955 and 1956, respectively. Jim Messina from Gibellina died in Alabama in 1947 while still in his 50s and makes an even stronger case that mafia members may have outlived the 1930s, as Messina was explicitly identified by Charlie Rosana as a member of a local "Camorra" or "Black Hand" organization in 1925 and Rosana produced a letter from Messina that essentially confirmed it.

The dissolution of Madison shows that a Family's break-up doesn't necessarily involve all members reporting to the same Family afterward. Only two were assigned to Milwaukee, the rest apparently going elsewhere. I won't speculate whether the remainder of Alabama's membership were represented by different Families, though their *compaesani* connections would have been relevant to this political matter even if it was mere formality. Alabama aside, Giuseppe Caterinicchia and his son-in-law Baldassare Mangiaracina both died in New Jersey, Caterinicchia being a few years shy of 100-years-old. The Caterinicchia-Amari clan's ties to the DeCavalcante Family and their shared roots in Ribera make it reasonable to wonder if Giuseppe Caterinicchia died as a decrepit and unknown DeCavalcante member in New Jersey, most of its historic membership never identified but drawing heavily from Agrigento.

There is no reason to suspect Alabama had a large Cosa Nostra organization. Sicilian Families are significantly smaller than those in the United States and Sicilian *pentito* Leonardo Messina stated that the formation of a Sicilian Cosa Nostra Family required a minimum of ten members in order to receive formal

recognition from the organization's larger governing bodies. The early American Families modeled themselves after Sicily and Birmingham's Italian community was made up of immigrants from mafia hotspots well-positioned in international networks, so even though Alabama's mafia group was likely small they had a viable recruitment pool available to meet their limited needs.

If the Family's youngest prospect was 74-years-old circa 1935, he would have been born in 1861, the same year as Giuseppe Caterinicchia. The Caterinicchia-Amari-Mangiaracina clan in Russellville and Birmingham alone had many younger male relatives and in-laws conditioned by Cosa Nostra's subculture, making it unlikely they were lacking recruits given the Sicilian tradition of recruiting via kinship and hometown. The city of Birmingham would have had even greater numbers of young men from similar Western Sicilian backgrounds who may not have had significant criminal operations but were molded by a philosophy more important to the mafia than specific crimes or businesses. We can't directly refute the information presented in Bill Bonanno's *Last Testament*, as we lack the inside sources necessary to clarify these details, but in context with the information presented here I don't believe his information is fully accurate. Bill did us a service by confirming Birmingham's existence as a recognized American Cosa Nostra Family but beyond that fact we must reconcile his information with other available resources.

Adding to doubts about the specifics mentioned by Bonanno are his references to the Newark Family, which he elaborates on in the same section where he discusses Alabama. The Newark Family is an obscure entity, too, though its proximity to New York and the many sources in that area have provided us with a general picture of what that organization consisted of and what transpired before and after the break-up of the Family. Bill's information on Newark is erroneous, raising further doubt about his Alabama anecdotes, an area even less known to him and the older men he knew.

Among Bill's mistakes, he states that Salvatore D'Aquila was part of the "Masseria Group" and the "local leader" of Newark, describing how after D'Aquila's murder he was replaced by Manfredi Mineo. D'Aquila was in fact replaced by Mineo, that much is true, but I'm sure Michael DiLeonardo and his Gambino mentors, the son and nephew of D'Aquila, not to mention Michael's grandfather Vincenzo, would get a kick out of the idea that D'Aquila was a Masseria-sponsored Newark boss. D'Aquila was a Masseria rival and the boss of the future Gambino Family. He was also the *capo dei capi*, giving Joe Masseria no authority over him, a factor that led Masseria to orchestrate D'Aquila's murder and assume his national title.

While the gist of Bonanno's information on Newark's disbandment is basically consistent with other sources, the group being broken up around the mid-1930s after several years of tension with the New York families, his specifics are lacking. Other sources and deeper research into the Newark group shows them to be active until around 1937, when Family boss Gaspare D'Amico survived an assassination attempt and his father was killed, resulting in their absorption by the New York Families. Bill states that Newark disbanded in 1934 or 1935, a trivial distinction I can't judge him for, but it does raise even greater doubt about his highly-specific information on the even murkier Alabama Family, including the ages of the members and their formal relationship to Tom Gagliano.

This article would not have been possible without Bill Bonanno's decision to publish a final memoir where he shares anecdotal knowledge of Birmingham. No matter how accurate or inaccurate his information is, to him I owe my initial inspiration to explore this organization. However, his information should be viewed as a springboard for further research and not a definitive source on the mafia in Alabama. I believe the available evidence supports Bill Bonanno's claim that the organization disbanded sometime around the 1930s, which is as good of a guess as any barring direct confirmation from a member who was there at the time.

The "Birmingham Family" existed and then ceased to exist, but it may be more accurate to refer to it as the Alabama Family when examining the wider geography of the individuals and clans explored here. Our limited sources do tell us this was a Sicilian-centric Family with ties to other Families who shared *compaesani* with the immigrant colonies found in Alabama and that Alabama mafiosi fell into the same networks. The Alabama Family was likely limited in terms of size and influence, with changes in immigration and local prejudices from non-Italians greatly stunting its growth, but it nonetheles existed to represent members within its jurisdiction. By necessity it must have followed the same patterns and principles found nationally and internationally under the umbrella of Cosa Nostra and by understanding that perhaps we will someday understand more about it.

Just as Bill Bonanno's account of Alabama should be approached critically, my work here may have details that prove to be inaccurate or that I misinterpreted in some way. The sheer amount of people, places, and connections I've attempted to organize was a daunting process and I've done my best to draft meaningful analysis of this information and present viable connections based on my obsessive interest in this world I have no experience in. I'm confident this is the most substantial resource on the Alabama mafia

currently available but my hope in publishing this article is that it leads to new information and interpretations even if it proves my analysis wrong. Maybe there is another Bill Bonanno still out there who was told about the mafia in Alabama and someday he'll come forward, however unlikely that may be.

Giuseppe Caterinicchia (far left) & Pasquale Amari (far right).

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I owe the following people credit:

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- Michael DiLeonardo's knowledge of Bisacquinesi in New York City was of immense help in understanding the relationships between Cosa Nostra members from Bisacquino in addition to other inside knowledge he's been willing to share. Please check out his new YouTube show.

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- Others contributed in various ways as well. Researching this subject is a group effort and I'm just a maniac trying to make sense of it.

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